

ENHANCING CAPACITY TO INNOVATE: KEY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



PROLINNOVA Strategy 2026–30

March 2026

Acknowledgements

This strategy represents the collective vision of the Prolinnova network for the period 2026–30, building on the foundations laid during the 2021–25 strategy cycle. Its development was a genuinely inclusive process, led by the **Foresight and Strategy Development Group** and informed by a series of consultations held between November 2024 and October 2025.

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Cover photograph: Janish Wettasinha

Acronyms

ARD	Agricultural research and/in development
CP	Country Platform
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ESA	Eastern & Southern Africa
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FIF	Farmer Innovation Fair
FLD	Farmer-led documentation
FO	Farmer organisation
GALID	Gender Analysis for Local Innovation Development
GFRAS	Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services
HLPE-FNS	High Level Panel of Experts on Food and Nutrition Security
ICT	Information and communication technology
IIRR	International Institute of Rural Reconstruction
IPW	International Partners Workshop
IST	International Support Team
LI	Local Innovation
LISF	Local Innovation Support Facility/Fund
LMSP	Local Multistakeholder Partnership
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MSP	Multistakeholder partnership
NFP	Northern Focal Point
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRM	Natural resource management
NSC	National Steering Committee
PID	Participatory Innovation Development
POG	Prolinnova Oversight Group
Prolinnova	Promoting local innovation in agroecology and natural resource management
PTD	Participatory Technology Development
RC	Regional Coordinator
SRC	Subregional Coordinator
SULCI-FaNS	Scaling Up Local Capacity to Innovate for Food and Nutrition Security
VSLA	Village Saving and Lending Association
WCA	West & Central Africa

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1 Introduction

Prolinnova — PROmoting Local INNOVAtion in agroecology and natural resource management — is an international community of practice built on a single conviction: that the innovative capacity of small-scale farmers¹ is the primary driver of sustainable agri-food systems, climate change adaptation and flourishing rural livelihoods. Prolinnova brings together NGOs, farmer organisations, government research agencies and educational institutions to ensure that agricultural research is a process driven by farmers themselves. Since its founding, the network has worked steadily toward a world in which women and men farmers have genuine agency in decisions about agricultural research and development.

1.1 Why focus on small-scale farmers?

Ending hunger remains one of the most urgent challenges of our time. Across Africa, Latin America and South Asia, food insecurity is rising — and small-scale farmers are central to the response. Peer-reviewed research² shows that farms of 20 hectares or less produce the majority of food commodities in Africa and Asia, with some estimates suggesting that up to 80% of locally consumed food in these regions comes from smallholder agriculture.

Small-scale farmers are also the custodians of local knowledge and agrobiodiversity that formal science cannot replicate. As climate shocks intensify and global food systems become more fragile, the low-cost, low-external-input approach of smallholder farming offers a pathway that is inclusive, equitable and resilient — particularly for the most vulnerable farm families.

1.2 Small-scale farmers and agricultural research and innovation

Prolinnova is part of the global agroecology movement, but agroecology is not its sole identity. Its distinctive contribution lies in decades of practice promoting **Local Innovation (LI)** and **Participatory Innovation Development (PID)** — and these approaches are central to the future of Agricultural Research “in” Development (ARD)³.

For centuries, farmers have been informal researchers, continuously refining their seeds and practices to suit local conditions. Yet formal research systems have been slow to recognise this. Despite growing international acknowledgement of farmer innovation — including through the UN Decade of Family Farming (2019–28)⁴ — many institutional efforts still focus on “validating” externally developed technologies rather than supporting the farmer-led innovation **process** itself.

¹ Within Prolinnova, the term “small-scale farmers” is used to refer to resource-poor crop-based and mixed crop-livestock farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk and forest users, as well as artisans operating at local level who are involved in activities related to food processing, storage and marketing.

² Herro M, Thornton P, Power B et al “Farming and the geography of nutrient production for human use – a transdisciplinary analysis, *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 1, e33-e42

³ Agricultural Research in Development is a term used deliberately instead of Agricultural Research for Development (AR4D) in order to stress that agricultural research and development are inextricably intertwined, i.e. that research is not carried out for a subsequent and separate activity of technology transfer but rather in the process of development.

⁴ <https://www.fao.org/family-farming-decade/home/en/>

Prolinnova addresses this gap by facilitating **PID**, placing farmers at the centre of multi-actor research for agroecological transformation. Agroecology cannot be handed down from above; it must be grounded in the lived experience and experimental knowledge of farmers themselves. Prolinnova advocates for agricultural research systems in which agroecological transitions are led by those who work the land.

1.3 Added value of the Prolinnova network

Prolinnova is an international community of practice that turns ideas into action. Its added value lies in its **Country Platforms (CPs)** — multistakeholder spaces where local NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs), researchers and farmers work together on equal terms. Over twenty-five years, the network has demonstrated resilience: despite fluctuating donor funding, it has matured and shifted coordination and fundraising leadership to the Global South.

What distinguishes Prolinnova is its focus beyond the technical fix. The network does not simply scale up technologies; it scales up the **capacity to innovate**. Rooted in practical work on soil health, water management, land and biodiversity restoration and climate adaptation, Prolinnova has come to understand innovation as fundamentally a **social and institutional process**.

Prolinnova's work extends well beyond supporting farmers to develop and test new practices. It also works to build the conditions that allow innovations to take root and spread. This means attending to social and institutional change — new ways of organising, collective action for resource management, processing and marketing of farm products — and treating local knowledge as a shared resource, not a private commodity. In doing so, Prolinnova strengthens what might be called the **knowledge commons**: the collective store of locally held innovation that sustains rural communities over time.

2 Background: development and achievements of the Prolinnova network

This section traces how Prolinnova developed as a network, summarises its main achievements and challenges in 2021–25, and sets out the conditions that shaped the 2026–30 strategy.

2.1 Strategy development process

The Prolinnova Oversight Group (POG) and the International Support Team (IST) led an inclusive, multi-method foresight and strategy development process, as follows:

1. **November 2024–March 2025:** Review of progress against the 2021–25 strategic plan and environmental scan (trend analysis and stock-taking) — led by CPs and Regional/Subregional Coordinators (R/SRCs).
2. **March 2025:** Identification of strategic outcomes and thematic focus areas, drawing on the foresight process and SWOT analysis — POG and IST.
3. **March–June 2025:** Regional consultations with R/SRCs and CPs to identify strategic intervention areas.
4. **June–October 2025:** Consultations with selected Friends of Prolinnova, farmer innovators and donors, and drafting of the 2026–30 strategy.
5. **November 2025:** Presentation, review and approval of the strategy at the International Partners Workshop (IPW).

2.2 How the network developed over time

Prolinnova was founded in 1999 at the Rambouillet meeting and has since grown into a robust international learning network. By 2025, it had expanded to 18 CPs spanning Africa, Asia and the Andes. In Africa, a regionalisation process supported by Misereor established the institutional infrastructure for two subregional platforms — West and Central Africa (WCA) and Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) — each supported by an SRC. In Asia, the CPs remain loosely networked, supported on a voluntary basis by a RC.

Deciding on network structure was not straightforward. The network had originally planned to relocate its coordination from an International Secretariat in the North to a host organisation in the South. Several potential hosts were assessed against criteria agreed at Prolinnova international partners meetings and the POG, but the preferred candidate in Asia (IIRR) was ultimately unable to take on the role. There were also concerns that housing the international secretariat in a single country could create regional tensions and undermine the sense of shared ownership across continents. The network therefore chose a decentralised, regionalised model — one that encourages CPs to establish (sub)regional platforms with coordinators, taskforces and virtual secretariats working in close communication.

A further governance question concerned the legal status of CPs. In 2013, the CP in Kenya experimented with formal registration as a legal entity. After reviewing the experience, the POG concluded that legal registration offered no advantage in advancing Prolinnova's vision and mission and did not improve the CP's ability to raise funds. The POG recommended deregistration and advised all CPs to remain as informal networks, in keeping with Prolinnova's principles. The CP in Kenya subsequently deregistered.

2.3 Main achievements and challenges in 2021–25

The 2021–25 period opened under the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic — a profound challenge for a network built on collaboration among people of diverse ages, genders, cultures and institutional backgrounds. Prolinnova partners responded with resourcefulness: they adapted quickly to virtual working and, in 2021, hosted a global virtual Farmer Innovation Fair (FIF) that brought together farmer innovators, ARD partners and supporters from across time zones, supported by A Growing Culture. The event proved to be a rich learning and sharing experience, and it marked the beginning of a series of FIFs that have since become flagship events of the network: national FIFs in Cameroon in 2021, in Burkina Faso in July 2022, an international FIF in Kenya in 2024, and a mini-FIF at the International Partners Workshop (IPW) in South India in 2025.

Over this period, Prolinnova partners at field level identified and supported a substantial number of farmer innovators, including a significant proportion of women who have taken on leadership roles in their communities. Many innovations progressed through the PID process, resulting in improved products and practices that benefited not only the innovators but their wider communities. In some cases — notably in Ghana and Kenya — market development and commercialisation have elevated local innovations to the level of rural enterprises with broader community impact.

These experiences demonstrate the potential of the PID approach to drive grassroots innovation, food and nutrition security, and livelihood improvement. They also show that tangible progress from local innovation to rural entrepreneurship can attract youth back to the farming sector — an important prospect for the network to build on. A key challenge going forward is to develop equitable social enterprise models that distribute benefits across communities rather than concentrating them among individual innovators.

A significant achievement of this period is the deeper integration of LI/PID into the work of CP partner organisations. Field staff in these organisations now promote and support farmer innovators as part of their regular work, enabling the identification of a wide range of agroecological innovations across farming systems — from water and soil management, crop breeding and pest control, to livestock health, processing and value addition. These innovations have addressed pressing problems in small-scale farming, including Fall Army Worm infestations, soil and water salination, declining infant and child nutrition, soil degradation and biodiversity loss. However, they have remained limited in geographic reach, and scaling these innovations and the PID process to wider areas remains a central challenge for the 2026–30 period.

Between 2021 and 2025, Prolinnova conducted 10 international and regional training workshops for LI/PID facilitators in Africa, led by senior trainers, with several additional sessions at local field levels. These workshops reached staff from CP partner institutions and a wide range of ARD institutions, including national agricultural research institutes, universities, agricultural colleges, district and provincial agriculture departments, NGOs and CBOs. More than 150 people trained through these workshops have since been engaged in supporting farmer-led innovation. Their participation in multi-stakeholder joint research processes has helped build the case for ARD policies to create space for the LI/PID approach.

However, a persistent challenge is the lack of compelling audio-visual and digital communication materials to share Prolinnova's experiences with policymakers, practitioners and wider audiences. The Prolinnova website, launched nearly 25 years ago, holds a valuable archive but no longer meets the expectations of contemporary users. Social media engagement remains limited. The Prolinnova Google Group has grown to over 1000 members and continues to attract new requests to join; as a moderated platform, it retains a distinct identity focused on the network's approach — but it cannot substitute for a modern digital communications strategy.

A lack of capacity amongst the Prolinnova members to provide PID training is a further constraint. Several senior PID trainers have retired, leaving only two or three competent LI/PID trainers to deliver international and regional training in English and French. In 2025, these senior trainers conducted a 10-day Training of Trainers in Senegal with participants who had prior facilitation experience and field exposure to farmer-led joint research. The programme was designed to be followed by a mentoring phase during which trainees will be engaged as co-trainers — with the aim of building a core group of PID trainers capable of meeting the network's future needs. The training content was also updated to incorporate emerging subject areas, including social entrepreneurship, community-based innovation funds and agroecology.

Prolinnova has established coordination structures for its African subregional network. Both Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) and West and Central Africa (WCA) now have subregional support teams for day-to-day operations and subregional oversight groups for governance. To reach their full potential, these structures require ongoing support from the subregional coordinators and the IST. In Asia, by contrast, the CPs remain loosely networked and have not yet formalised regional structures, primarily because of limited finances for coordination and networking. The Asian CPs will need to find creative approaches to strengthening cross-CP collaboration if they are to develop a more cohesive regional presence with their own operational and governance arrangements.

2.4 Conditions influencing Prolinnova's strategy development

Prolinnova's 2026–30 strategy responds to a combination of internal reflection and significant shifts in the external environment. The network's core approach remains relevant, but it requires reframing and strengthening. In particular, the strategy is shaped by the need to: position agroecology as the overarching framework for Prolinnova's work; reposition PID as a driver of systemic transition rather than a standalone methodology; sharpen focus on climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss; build stronger evidence of impact at scale; promote adaptive, learning-oriented governance; and align with national, regional and continental agroecology and food systems policies. Without this renewal, Prolinnova risks losing relevance in a rapidly changing development landscape.

2.4.1 Shifts in the agroecology landscape

Over the past two decades, agroecology has evolved from a focus on specific technical practices to a broader, systems-oriented and transformational approach. Prolinnova's longstanding support for PID and knowledge co-creation — now recognised by FAO and HLPE-FNS as a core agroecological principle — is a genuine strength, but it is no longer sufficient on its own. PID is one component of a wider set of agroecological principles that

encompasses systems thinking, equity, resilience, governance, markets and policy influence. Prolinnova must position PID clearly within this overarching agroecological framework rather than presenting it as a standalone innovation process.

2.4.2 Scaling beyond local innovation

Internal assessments and partner feedback suggest that Prolinnova's work has tended to focus on individual or incremental innovations, with less attention to how these contribute to system-wide change. Local innovations may deliver real benefits, but without being embedded in a broader strategic sequence — one that addresses farming systems, food systems and institutional contexts — their impacts can remain fragmented and short-lived. This points to a need for Prolinnova to more explicitly connect its field-level work to the root causes it seeks to address, namely climate change, land and soil degradation, biodiversity loss and structural inequality.

2.4.3 Supporting agroecological transition

The strategic context has shifted from 'agroecological intensification' towards managed transitions to agroecology — a process that requires coordinated technical, social, ecological and institutional change. Prolinnova's response is to adopt agroecology as the overarching framework for its work and to reposition PID as a mechanism for knowledge co-production in support of inclusive and sustainable food system transformation. This transition perspective calls for combining incremental and transformational innovations, supporting innovation processes across multiple levels (household, community, market, policy) and evaluating success based on contributions to resilience and systems change rather than isolated outputs. Prolinnova's existing strategy, monitoring and impact assessment tools will need to be aligned with this logic.

2.4.4 Strengthening evidence and policy influence

Despite documenting many case studies, Prolinnova has not yet produced sufficient evidence on how farmer-led innovations spread, reach critical mass, improve livelihoods at scale, or influence markets and policies. This gap limits the network's credibility with policymakers and donors and weakens its voice in advocacy and international policy discussions. A greater focus on analysing adoption pathways and systemic effects — rather than celebrating individual innovations — is needed to build the evidence base that will sustain Prolinnova's influence going forward.

2.4.5 Navigating a shifting funding environment

The external funding landscape has changed substantially. Donors now prioritise agroecology, climate resilience, systems change and global public goods, while official development assistance is shrinking and becoming more competitive. For Prolinnova, the challenge is to align its funding proposals with these priorities without compromising its core values — a task that requires greater strategic coherence and clarity of positioning. Failing to articulate how PID sits within the broader agroecology agenda risks narrowing the network's access to future funding.

2.4.6 Technological advancements

In its 2026-30 strategic plan, Prolinnova will consider the critical need to address the rising trend of corporate control over African agriculture, increasingly facilitated by digital technologies such as drones, precision agriculture, and digital advisory platforms. While these innovations are often presented as essential for food security, they are frequently driven by a powerful alliance between Big Tech (e.g., Google, Microsoft) and Big Ag firms (e.g., Bayer, Syngenta), which are gaining increasing control over farming decisions and data often in support of profits derived from the use of hybrid seeds and pesticides.

A specific example is the **PlantVillage Nuru** AI assistant used in Kenya and Tanzania. This digital app is designed specifically for small-scale farmers to help with real-time crop disease and pest diagnosis. Despite its potential benefits, this AI-driven platform **externalizes decision-making**, moving power away from the farmers themselves. It tends to increase dependence on expensive external chemicals and distant, unaccountable algorithms.

Such corporate-led pathways undermine the agency and indigenous knowledge of small-scale farmers by framing agricultural innovation as a top-down, externally controlled process, effectively undermining farmer knowledge, in the interests of corporate profit. This "digitalization" often locks farmers into expensive technological treadmills that prioritize efficiency over the participatory innovation and local autonomy central to Prolinnova's mission.

Moving forward, Prolinnova network members will be vigilant, raise community awareness about these risks while actively seeking out, learning from and fostering alternative, locally controlled digital tools. One example is the **Ugunduzi** app, in use in Tanzania. This is an open-source digital tool designed to support **farmer-led innovation** and the documentation of local agricultural practices. Ugunduzi provides small-scale farmers a space to share and validate **indigenous knowledge and local innovation**. Farmers use the platform to record successful local experiments, fostering a database of grassroots evidence for agroecology, based on peer-to-peer knowledge exchange. **This helps communities co-develop innovations that are ecologically appropriate and socially just within their specific contexts, and to** strengthen rather than displace agroecological practices and digital sovereignty.

2.4.7 Adaptive governance and learning

Escalating crises — climate change, inequality, ecological collapse — have exposed the limits of static, multi-year strategies. Effective governance now requires adaptive approaches, real-time learning and strong feedback loops between practice, evidence and decision-making. Internal reflection has identified specific weaknesses in Prolinnova's network-level governance, M&E, learning systems and cross-regional policy coordination. Addressing these is essential for the network to remain relevant and effective. Concretely, this means streamlining outcomes and thematic areas, aligning PID guidelines, M&E, training and funding criteria with relevant themes/movements such as agroecology, and strengthening network governance and resource mobilisation.

2.4.8 Equity, localisation and partnership norms

International development discourse is increasingly focused on equitable partnerships, power imbalances, localisation and South-South cooperation. There is growing scepticism towards vague partnership principles that lack accountability, and a stronger emphasis on purpose, impact and mutual benefit. These shifts challenge Prolinnova to demonstrate concretely how its network structure, partnerships and knowledge co-production practices promote equity, justice and long-term systems change.

2.4.9 Alignment with regional agroecology and food systems policies

Prolinnova's strategy is designed to align with the agroecology and food systems policies of the regions and countries where it works. The key implications for each region are as follows.

For Asia, the strategy supports:

- Co-designing action research with local stakeholders and supporting territorial-level innovations that address youth and gender priorities.
- Developing shared frameworks for assessing the performance and impact of agroecological and sustainable food system pathways.
- Facilitating policy dialogues on agriculture, food, health and trade at local, national and regional levels.
- Promoting shared pathways toward agroecological and sustainable food system transitions.

For Africa, the strategy contributes to:

- Intensifying sustainable food production and processing.
- Boosting investment in agroecology and food systems.
- Advancing inclusivity and equitable livelihoods.
- Strengthening Prolinnova's governance, implementation and coordination.
- Increasing smallholder farmer participation in decision-making.

3 Concepts, aims and principles

3.1 Main concepts

3.1.1 “Farmers”

Within Prolinnova, the term “small-scale farmers” (hereafter: “farmers”) refers to low-income crop-based and mixed crop-livestock farmers, pastoralists, fishers and forest users, as well as artisans and small-scale processors operating at local level who are involved in the entire food value chain – from raising animals and growing crops, to harvesting, processing, storage and marketing of produce.

3.1.2 “Local innovation”

Local innovation (without “s”) is the process by which people develop new and better ways of doing things in their locality, drawing on their own resources and initiative. This may be driven by curiosity, or by the need to respond to changes in natural resources, assets, markets and other socio-economic and institutional conditions brought about by demographic trends, policies, disasters, climate change or other external influences. Local innovation frequently arises in response to new challenges or opportunities and often involves informal experimentation by resource users.

The outcomes or products of this innovation process are local innovations (with “s”) — new practices, techniques or ways of organising that have been developed by individuals, groups or communities and are understood and owned by local people.

Innovations may involve changes in behaviour, new farming techniques or new ways of organising farming and other NRM activities — including production, harvesting, processing, distribution, marketing and financial mechanisms. They may be technical or socio-institutional in nature, including local policy changes such as bylaws governing natural resource use. A successful local innovation process generates local innovations that improve the lives of many people in the area. Prolinnova gives particular emphasis to innovations that benefit disadvantaged groups — including the very poor, the marginalised, and in many societies, women and youth.

Prolinnova identifies, documents and supports farmer-led innovation processes and the resulting innovations. It raises awareness of the value of local innovativeness for meeting the needs of farming families and communities and encourages development agents and scientists to treat local innovation as an entry point for joint inquiry — identifying shared questions that can be explored together with farmers to improve agriculture and NRM sustainably through PID.

3.1.3 “Participatory innovation development” (PID)

PID is an approach to ARD grounded in farmers’ own motivations and ideas for addressing local challenges or seizing opportunities to improve livelihoods. It brings together farmers, development agents (government / NGOs), scientists (from universities and R&D institutions) — and, wherever possible, the private sector with shared values and goals - in partnership. PID encompasses not only “hard” technological innovations but also “soft” socio-institutional and cultural changes, such as shifts in gender roles (e.g. women taking on ploughing

responsibilities). At its core is farmer-led participatory research and joint experimentation, in which farmers and other stakeholders jointly investigate ways to improve local livelihoods.

Identifying local innovation is the entry point to PID. “Outsiders” — development workers, agricultural advisors/ extensionists and research scientists— begin by observing how farmers are already responding to the challenges and opportunities they face. These concrete local examples form the basis for a shared situation analysis with farmer innovators and community members, leading to the joint planning of research and development activities. The local community and the “outsiders” then assess together the current and likely future impacts of an innovation — asking whether it will benefit a large number of families, particularly the poorer and more disadvantaged, and whether it will avoid negative environmental or social consequences. PID is, above all, an approach to development.

3.1.4 “Multistakeholder partnerships” (MSPs)

In Prolinnova, MSPs bring together three or more types of actors with a shared interest in improving local livelihoods through innovation in agroecology and NRM. The primary stakeholders are women and men farmers; they are joined by researchers, agricultural advisors, educators, policymakers, private entrepreneurs and consumers. Partnership means that these actors jointly plan and implement activities toward a shared goal, mobilising and sharing resources and agreeing on how those resources will be managed. MSPs often operate as “platforms”: mechanisms for periodic sharing and negotiation that enable dialogue, joint decision-making and self-assessment of progress. They operate at multiple levels across the Prolinnova network — from local to international — and serve different purposes.

3.2 Vision, mission and goal

Prolinnova will continue to pursue its vision and mission in the 2026–30 strategic period, guided by its core values and principles.

3.2.1 Vision

A world in which women and men farmers play decisive roles in agroecology and NRM innovation processes for sustainable livelihoods.

3.2.2 Mission

To stimulate a culture of mutual learning and synergy among diverse stakeholder groups to actively support and promote local innovation processes in agroecology and NRM.

3.2.3 Goal

To contribute to equitable and inclusive development of resilient and sustainable farming communities.

3.3 Core values and principles of the Prolinnova network

3.3.1 Core values

- **Social equity & respect.** All actors in Prolinnova — practitioners, researchers and development partners alike — have equal status and are equally recognised for the value of their knowledge and expertise. The network respects diversity and strives to be free of bias regarding sex, religion, ethnic origin, political orientation, wealth or social class. Prolinnova seeks to ensure that women and men participate and benefit equally, while recognising that historically disadvantaged actors need additional support to become genuine partners — hence the emphasis on equity rather than merely equality.
- **Commitment.** Network members understand that social change towards inclusive development is a long process and that external funding will not always be available to support the full effort required. Prolinnova members therefore commit to contributing time and energy on a voluntary basis to keep the network and its partnerships functioning at national and international level, whatever the funding situation.
- **Transparency & accountability.** Prolinnova is committed to sharing information openly — on strategy, plans, progress (including both successes and failures) and finances — so that all partners have equal access to the information they need for decision-making about the network's development.
- **Sustainability.** Prolinnova promotes innovation and development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The network works to minimise or eliminate any negative social, economic or environmental effects of its activities.
- **Partnership.** Prolinnova believes in partnership as the inclusive participation of all stakeholders in the practice, research and development of agroecology and NRM — and in the decisions that affect their lives. This means building relationships of mutual trust and respect, underpinned by open communication and shared responsibilities. Central to this value is strengthening the confidence and capacities of farmers and farmer organisations so that they become genuinely empowered partners in shaping the network's shared future.

3.3.2 Core principles

- **Integration:** Activities to promote local innovation and facilitate PID should be embedded within broader community development initiatives, rather than operating as stand-alone interventions.
- **Shared learning:** Prolinnova engages with wider communities of practice to share and learn about local innovation, PID and participatory approaches to research and development at national and international levels.
- **Good governance:** At national, regional and international level, Prolinnova has governance entities responsible for ensuring transparency and accountability, promoting inclusive participation, mediating differing interests to build consensus, and ensuring that the network's strategy and processes make the best use of available resources in working toward the Prolinnova mission and vision.

- **Ownership:** Member organisations and individuals take responsibility for planning and implementing network activities and demonstrate active commitment to doing so.
- **Protection of IP:** Ensure appropriate mechanisms protect the intellectual property of innovators.
- **Open-source innovation (“copyleft”):** Unless otherwise specified, anyone may use, modify or build on the innovations identified and described by Prolinnova, provided that any resulting innovations are likewise freely available and that descriptions of them include the “copyleft” proviso and acknowledge the source (see www.prolinnova.net/content/prolinnova-guidelines).

4 Thematic focus areas

Prolinnova focuses on joint innovation processes in agriculture and NRM, encompassing both:

- Agroecology (Ecological agriculture) for secure and healthy food production and market systems — covering field crops, vegetables, fruits, herbs and spices, seed systems, livestock, apiculture, edible insects, aquaculture, agroforestry and integrated farming systems; and
- Sustainable NRM through the careful management and use of soil, water, grazing land and forest resources, including non-timber forest products.

Within this scope, the network’s actions are organised around the following thematic areas:

- **Innovative methodologies:** Prolinnova continues to develop, test and learn from new methodologies that promote local innovation and PID — building on its experience with approaches such as LISFs, FIFs, HAPID, FLD and GALID⁵.
- **Resilience, land degradation, loss of biodiversity and climate change:** Local innovation enables communities to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of externally driven change, including climate change. Prolinnova facilitates PID processes involving diverse stakeholders in farming communities to strengthen collective resilience and build capacity to address land degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change. The TEES criteria — Technical effectiveness, Economic validity, Environmental friendliness and Social acceptability — include assessment of an innovation’s contributions to climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- **Nutrition and health:** Local innovation in agroecology and NRM can improve nutrition and food safety and help prevent and mitigate human disease. Building on the experience of recent projects such as SULCI-FaNS, ELI-FaNS, Navinut⁶ etc., Prolinnova is giving greater attention to recognising and facilitating innovation in this area.

⁵ LISF – Local Innovation Support Funds; HAPID – HIV Aids and Participatory Innovation Development; FLD – Farmer-Led Documentation; GALID – Gender Approaches to Local Innovation Development

⁶ SULCI-FaNS – Supporting Local Innovative Capacity for Food and Nutrition Security; ELI-FaNS – Expanding Local Innovation for Food and Nutrition Security; NaviNut - Enhancing women’s agency in navigating changing food environments to improve child nutrition in African drylands

- **Urban and peri-urban agriculture:** Local innovation in agroecology and agri-food enterprises in and around cities and towns offers opportunities to strengthen local food systems, particularly for low-income urban producers and consumers. As urbanisation grows, Prolinnova is increasing its attention to this area.
- **Gender equity in innovation processes:** Gender relations shape how women engage in farmer-led research and innovation in agricultural, NRM and food systems. Gender gaps continue to constrain women's agricultural and economic productivity and limit their ability to access new opportunities. Prolinnova gives focused attention to gender equity in innovation — including socio-institutional and cultural innovations that strengthen women's roles in farming communities. The GALID⁷ guidelines are integrated into PID training to equip field practitioners with the skills to mainstream gender within PID processes.
- **Youth innovation in agri-food systems:** While youth are addressed across all thematic areas, Prolinnova gives dedicated attention to recognising and promoting innovation by young people in agroecology and agri-food enterprises — including processing, distribution and marketing of agricultural and natural-resource products. Social entrepreneurship is encouraged as a way to build agri-based small businesses grounded in social solidarity. Young people are also supported to use ICT to document local innovation and farmer-led research and development.
- **Small-scale farmer involvement in local value chains and social entrepreneurship:** Prolinnova is increasing its focus on PID in market-oriented agriculture and natural resource use, helping small-scale farmers raise incomes through greater added value and improved market access. This includes PID in organising producer groups, cooperatives and social enterprises, and supporting marketing through produce branding (e.g. by origin, organic certification, environmental credentials, or women's production). Validated and documented local innovations are promoted through awareness-raising and linkages with relevant regulatory and certification bodies, so that innovators can access funding and other benefits. Support for commercialising improved innovations is pursued through social enterprises and other mechanisms that direct benefits to communities rather than to individual innovators alone.

⁷ GALID – Gender Analysis for Local Innovation Development, <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/9279611c-0c20-4f04-9f45-e4718f988ee5>

5 Strategic directions, outcomes sought and activities

5.1 Strategic directions

1. Promote LI and PID for agroecological transformation.
2. Promote and sustain LISFs.
3. Build and strengthen farmer innovator networks.
4. Systematically track and document PID outcomes and impacts.
5. Expand Prolinnova's influence in ARD policy.
6. Ensure the growth and sustainability of Prolinnova as a community of practice.

5.2 Actions related to each strategic direction

5.2.1 Strategic Direction 1: Promote LI and PID for agroecological transformation

Strengthen LI/PID processes and practices

- Strengthen the network's capacity to understand and implement LI/PID for economic, social and environmental benefit.
- Deepen the participation of women and youth in LI/PID.
- Identify, document and support local innovations and farmer-led joint research, with a focus on agroecological transformation; extend the LI/PID approach into agricultural value chain activities such as agro-processing and marketing, through socially equitable mechanisms (social enterprises, community-owned businesses, fair trade partnerships).
- Emphasise PID as a locally grounded approach to climate change adaptation and mitigation, drawing on agroecological principles to develop context-specific solutions.
- Develop alternative mechanisms that are appropriate for protecting the IP of farmer innovators.

Strengthen capacity to facilitate PID, based on local innovation

- Increase the number of trained LI/PID facilitators and systematically assess and strengthen the quality of training delivery.
- Build the capacity of Prolinnova partner organisations — in agricultural research, development and education — to facilitate LI/PID processes competently, supporting knowledge co-production grounded in farmer innovation.
- Prioritise training for behavioural and attitudinal change among ARD partners as a prerequisite for effective PID facilitation.

Foster LI/PID institutionalisation and partnerships

- Build and strengthen diverse partnerships with organisations engaged in LI/PID.
- Deepen the institutionalisation of LI/PID within regional and CPs and their member organisations.

5.2.2 Strategic Direction 2: Promote and sustain LISFs

Build and sustain LISFs

- Strengthen existing LISFs and establish new ones where needed.
 - Build the capacity of Local Multistakeholder Platforms (MSPs) to set up and manage LISFs for PID activities.
 - Explore creative ways to sustain LISFs, including revolving mechanisms (e.g. charging interest on funds extended to innovators), social funds and community revenue contributions.
- Use LISF resources to support farmer innovation.
 - Support farmer testing and experimentation aligned with the PID approach.
 - Support the commercialisation and promotion of proven innovations in line with the guidelines, which includes the protection of IP.
 - Support learning and sharing through cross-visits and farmer innovation fairs.
- Strengthen the financial sustainability of LISFs.
 - Build the capacity of Local MSPs and innovators to engage local government, philanthropists and other stakeholders in LISF fundraising.
 - Partner with Village Savings and Lending Associations (VSLAs) to channel savings into LISFs and establish relevant banking relationships.
 - Expand VSLA models to support LISFs through social funds and community revenue contributions.

5.2.3 Strategic Direction 3: Build and strengthen farmer innovator networks

Support networking, learning and collective action

- Support networking, exchanges and shared learning among farmers and local innovators at local, regional and international levels.
 - Support and strengthen FIFs, finding resource-efficient and innovative ways to continue hosting them, building on lessons from past events.
- Build the capacity of local innovators — with a focus on women and youth — to organise and sustain their innovation and PID activities.
- Strengthen the social capital of local innovators by creating and supporting community-managed innovation spaces (hubs, schools, labs or centres).
- Invest in community institutions that enable local innovators to organise for collective action and sustain their innovation over time.
- Build farmer innovators' and communities' capacity to engage with and influence decision-making bodies, research institutions and extension services.
- Support projects that directly advance the work of local innovators and sustain local innovation processes.
- Engage experienced farmer innovators to mentor youth into farming and strengthen their capacity to innovate.
- Provide meaningful incentives and recognition to farmer innovators to build and sustain their networks.
- Build farmer innovators' capacity to use ICT in their work and for networking.

5.2.4 Strategic Direction 4: Systematically track and document PID outcomes and impacts

Enhance documentation, monitoring and communication

- Select ‘proof of concept’ sites to generate rigorous evidence of PID effectiveness.
- Develop and implement documentation and sharing plans tailored to different audiences, scaling needs and formats.
- Support innovative, cost-effective documentation methods, including participatory video, student involvement, social media and theatre.
- Strengthen network capacity at all levels for evidence-based communication.
- Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and learning systems to be outcome- and impact-driven, with explicit planning for data collection and reporting.
- Package and communicate evidence in forms appropriate for diverse audiences — policymakers, donors, academics and farmers.
- Hold periodic innovation and knowledge-sharing events, such as inter-community and inter-CP exchanges, competitions and farmer innovator showcases.
- Establish a repository of documented innovations and PID outcomes, focusing on what is feasible to maintain given network capacity.

5.2.5 Strategic Direction 5: Expand Prolinnova’s influence in ARD and relevant policy

Mainstream local innovation in ARD policy and practice

Prolinnova prioritises mainstreaming LI/PID within ARD policy, where institutionalisation is still at an early stage. Engagement with other sector policies may follow as the ARD policy foundation strengthens.

- Strengthen the network’s capacity to identify and engage the most relevant organisations and decision-making processes at national and regional levels, taking into account the power dynamics among state and non-state actors.
- Build solidarity among farmer innovators and communities to engage with and influence research, extension and development institutions.
 - Support experienced innovators to demonstrate their innovations at ARD fora.
 - Support a focused policy engagement function within CPs, connecting experienced practitioners, relevant institutions and documentation to build influence.
- Establish and strengthen partnerships with like-minded organisations to advocate for agroecology and sustainable food systems in policy and budget processes.
- Strategically engage community leaders — assembly members, key informants, group leaders, traditional authorities and others — in Prolinnova activities to strengthen the mainstreaming of local innovation.
 - Promote a bottom-up approach in which capacity is built from the grassroots upwards.
- Advocate at higher policy levels for the mainstreaming of local innovation, using grassroots evidence to build buy-in among institutional decision-makers.
 - Monitor policy developments from above and develop evidence-based entry points and counter-narratives grounded in community experience.

5.2.6 Strategic Direction 6: Ensure the growth and sustainability of Prolinnova as a community of practice

Strengthen partnerships

- Expand partnerships at all levels — CPs, regions, international — with organisations and individuals who share a people-centred, participatory development ethos. Individual CPs determine their own partnership frameworks in line with Prolinnova's norms and principles; there is no single prescribed blueprint.
- Continue and deepen South-South learning and exchanges, moving beyond general knowledge-sharing to substantive cross-context learning. Actively work to decentralise exchanges beyond CP coordinators to include farmers, particularly in language-diverse regions such as Asia.
- Broaden and deepen multistakeholder partnerships, strengthening links with agroecology networks, the private sector (particularly small enterprises aligned with the network's values), youth and women's groups.
- Co-design and jointly implement programmes and projects with members.

Enhance internal network building and governance

- Attract and mentor new members, particularly young people, who are passionate about Prolinnova's mission. Develop accessible 'explainers' of Prolinnova's approach to reduce jargon barriers for local communities, supporting new members entering through the network's mentorship model.
- Develop and implement inclusive decision-making and accountability structures.
- Strengthen network management and coordination, including by increasing paid staff capacity where possible.
- Ensure good governance, transparency and accountability at all levels, including through periodic external review of the decentralised governance structure.

Diversify and strengthen resource mobilisation

The strategic actions below provide the basis for the full resource mobilisation narrative in Section 7.

- Diversify resource mobilisation strategies, engaging current and past funders, philanthropic organisations and the private sector. Develop a 'funder ambassador' model and ensure the network engages funders as a whole — as a consortium — rather than through fragmented regional or CP-level approaches, to build access to a central pool of funds.
- Build the network's institutional capacity and legitimacy to attract and receive funding.
- Develop a comprehensive resource mobilisation strategy, including social enterprise development, benefit-sharing mechanisms and alternative funding models (e.g. LISF-linked loan and interest models, membership fees).
- Increase use of national budgets and reduce dependency on a small number of international donors.
- Develop Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) on working modalities and cost-sharing with partner institutions, to formalise commitments across the decentralised network.

6 Organisational structure and roles

In 2026–30, Prolinnova will consolidate and strengthen the most important elements of its structure: the CPs. Building on the progress made between 2016 and 2025 in establishing subregional platforms in Africa and strengthening regional coordination, the network will deepen the functionality and independence of these structures.

6.1 Structures

6.1.1 CPs and National Contact Persons

In each country, a local organisation — usually an NGO — convenes the key stakeholders in ARD and serves as secretariat for the **CP**. Each CP is governed by a National Steering Committee (NSC) drawn from NGOs, government research and education bodies, farmer groups and organisations, the agriculture-related private sector, and in some cases other groups such as women’s organisations, youth or consumer representatives. The NSC defines the scope of CP activities, provides strategic guidance, helps mobilise resources and serves as the national oversight and accountability structure.⁸ A smaller “core team” or “working group” coordinates day-to-day implementation. Organisational arrangements at national level are decided by the NSC and vary between CPs; some devolve responsibilities to structures at provincial or district level. CPs are encouraged to continue experimenting with different ways of organising themselves and to share their learning across the network.

In countries where partners have not been sufficiently active to retain recognition as a CP, an individual may volunteer as the **National Contact Person** — a point of contact for others in that country who wish to learn about or collaborate in promoting farmer-led participatory research and innovation. Volunteer contact persons may also take on this role in countries where no CP has yet been established.

6.1.2 Regional and subregional platforms

In 2026–30, Prolinnova focuses on consolidating the subregional platforms in ESA and WCA, supporting the Asian CPs to formalise their regional coordination, and exploring options for an Andean platform. The potential for a European regional grouping will continue to be explored in partnership with the Northern Focal Point.

The international network operates through a decentralised structure of (sub)regional groupings that maintain links primarily through web-based communication — including the Prolinnova website, email lists and video-conferencing platforms — and annual or biennial face-to-face meetings.

CPs in each (sub)region decide how to structure the network and carry out activities within their area in keeping with Prolinnova’s guidelines and integrity policy. During the period, 2021–25, following up on decisions taken at the IPW in 2019, oversight bodies were established in each (sub)region in Africa and members of virtual (sub)regional support teams responsible for CP backstopping, capacity strengthening, and facilitating sharing and learning have been

⁸ As explained in Prolinnova Guidelines No. 1, in very large countries, it is also possible that a “CP” covers only part of a country, e.g. South India

identified. Coordinators and partners from more established CPs mentor newer and emerging CPs within the (sub)regional platforms.

Most sharing and learning are organised at regional or subregional level, which is more cost-effective than multi-regional events. Interregional networking is primarily virtual and focuses on issues of common concern identified by the (sub)regional platforms, which decide how responsibilities for this networking are allocated. Interregional meetings are held every two to three years where possible, ideally alongside another international event attended by people from several CPs. International networking through the Google Group and the Prolinnova website continues.

(Sub)regional platforms work to raise the visibility and credibility of PID approaches in relevant ARD fora. Each SRC, or a designated representative, prepares for and participates in regional and subregional consultations under FARA, ASARECA, CORAF/WE CARD, CCARDESA, FORAGRO and APAARI, and the corresponding rural advisory services fora under GFRAS. Note: Engagement with these regional bodies is an area for improved effort in 2026–30; it remains an aspiration that was not fully realised in the previous strategic period.

The costs of (sub)regional coordination are covered by budget lines integrated into individual CP and multi-CP project budgets. SRCs report to the coordinators of these projects, as well as to the POG and the CPs in the (sub)region concerned.

6.1.3 International Support Team (IST)

The IST supports Prolinnova partners at national and (sub)regional level through fundraising, capacity strengthening, web-based knowledge management, policy dialogue and other activities that raise the network's profile and disseminate learning about local innovation and PID. The IST currently comprises individuals associated with Agrecol Association (Germany), the Institute of Natural Resources (South Africa), the Centre for International Cooperation of the Vrije Universiteit (Netherlands) and IIRR (Philippines), working part-time for Prolinnova, as well as the SRCs in Africa, currently based in Kenya and Benin and a RC for Asia based in Nepal. The coordinators of multi-CP projects also participate in the IST for the duration of their projects.

The IST provides technical backstopping and mentoring on PID approaches and supports international policy dialogue and publishing. It advises CPs and multi-CP projects on organising capacity-strengthening activities, co-facilitates training programmes, encouraging the involvement of and mentoring potential trainers from across the network. Together with experienced CP partners, the IST supports proposal writing, fund management, administrative and financial procedures, and M&E. It also provides information on relevant training offered by other organisations and advises (sub)regional platforms on mechanisms for interregional networking, learning and global policy influence.

The roles of IST members based in the North have been progressively taken over by (sub)regional platform coordinators. This shift in responsibilities is ongoing, with the aim of establishing a sustainable mechanism of mutual support between CPs and (sub)regions. IIRR in the Philippines manages the Prolinnova website. An IST member based in Europe provides focal support for M&E.

In 2026–30, costs for IST members' time and travel continue to be included in project proposals from CPs and (sub)regional platforms. IST members report to project coordinators and keep the POG, the CPs, (sub)regional coordinators and the Agrecol Board informed of their activities.

6.1.4 Northern Focal Point (NFP)

Prolinnova retains a Northern presence to maintain closer links with donor organisations based there and to include a regional grouping of like-minded organisations in Europe. Agrecol Association for AgriCulture & Ecology — a German membership-based NGO — serves as the NFP. Working as a virtual team, IST members based in Germany and the Netherlands cultivate links with potential donors and European partners (NGOs, universities, research organisations and private sector partners) for funding proposals. They also help the POG maintain an overview of network activities and support (sub)regional platforms in linking with each other across continents.

Where needed, SRCs communicate with the NFP to facilitate contact with North-based ARD partners and donor organisations.

6.1.5 Prolinnova Oversight Group (POG)

In 2026–30, the POG continues to refine its governance role in line with the growing autonomy of (sub)regional platforms, progressively sharing oversight responsibilities across the network.

The POG guides the network, advises on strategy, and monitors and assures the integrity and quality of work carried out under the Prolinnova umbrella — including by facilitating the development of network guidelines and giving final approval to them. Together with the Friends of Prolinnova, the POG supports efforts to generate funds from diverse sources for the CPs, the (sub)regional platforms and, where necessary, the NFP. Agrecol Association currently carries out this role on a voluntary basis. (Sub)regionally based POG members play a particular role in supporting their platforms in fundraising.

6.1.6 Friends of Prolinnova

To strengthen the guidance it provides to the network, the POG has established a group of **Friends of Prolinnova**. This group comprises people who have been associated with the network in the past and are willing to continue contributing to it. Their roles include mentoring in areas of expertise, supporting strategy development, improving the quality of CP and (sub)regional platform proposals, linking with new partners and funders, and helping to improve and disseminate Prolinnova products and publications. Together with the POG, the Friends of Prolinnova help raise the network's profile and strengthen its influence in international policy debates.

Members communicate electronically. The time they contribute depends on their availability to engage with ideas and respond to requests. Communication between the Friends and the CPs, (sub)regional platforms and coordinators is channelled through the IST, unless individual members prefer direct contact.

The Friends of Prolinnova currently numbers nineteen members. The POG and the IST jointly select individuals to invite, drawing first from former POG members and other contacts suggested by the CPs. The IST notifies all CPs of new Friends and their areas of expertise.

Current CP coordinators and IST members are not eligible to join the Friends of Prolinnova but may be invited to do so after stepping down from their network positions.

6.2 Sharing of roles and responsibilities

Table 1 summarises the roles and responsibilities of the components of the Prolinnova network. These roles will continue to evolve as (sub)regional platforms grow in strength and capacity. In 2026–30, the network will invest in capacity strengthening to deepen Southern expertise, and CPs — the building blocks of the network — will take on a more active role in communicating with other CPs and with external partners. A culture of shared responsibilities and collaboration will continue to be nurtured across all levels of the network.

Table 1: Roles and responsibilities of components of the Prolinnova network, 2026–30

Role & responsibilities	Country Platform (CP)	(Sub)Regional Platform / Coordinator (SRC)	International Support Team (IST)	Northern Focal Point (NFP)	Prolinnova Oversight Group (POG)	Friends of Prolinnova
Fundraising	√	√	√	√	√	√
Backstopping & coaching	√	√	√			
Implementing PID	√					
Fund management	√	√	√			
Policy advocacy	√	√	√	√	√	√
Monitoring & evaluation	√	√	√		√	
Strategy development	√	√	√		√	√
Sharing & dissemination	√	√	√	√	√	√
Institutionalisation	√	√	√			
Capacity building	√	√	√			

7 Resource mobilisation

7.1 The challenge: funding a community of practice

Prolinnova's funding situation is unusual among international development networks, and understanding this distinctiveness is essential to addressing it. The network is not a programme with a defined budget and a single funder; it is a community of practice that has, for most of its history, assembled its resources from project grants, voluntary contributions of time, and the institutional support of its host organisations. This model has proven its resilience — it has kept the network alive through periods of scarce dedicated funding and has kept ownership firmly with its members. However, it also creates a structural vulnerability: without a stable core funding base, the network's capacity to coordinate, learn, communicate and influence policy fluctuates with individual project cycles.

The development finance environment has shifted significantly, as described in Section 2.4. The changes are not temporary: official development assistance is shrinking and becoming more competitive, and donors are demanding stronger evidence of impact at scale and clearer alignment with agroecological frameworks. These are trends that Prolinnova can and must respond to — not by chasing every available funding stream, but by making deliberate choices about which funding relationships to build, how to position the network's work, and how to gradually reduce its dependency on external grant cycles altogether.

A further structural consideration is Prolinnova's legal status. The network operates as an informal association rather than a registered entity — a deliberate choice that avoids competing with member organisations for funding and reflects the network's identity as a community of practice. This choice remains the right one for network cohesion and equity. However, it does create practical constraints: many funding opportunities require a registered legal entity as grant recipient. Prolinnova addresses this through **designated lead agencies** — member organisations that receive and distribute funds on behalf of one or more of the CPs. Strengthening and formalising this model through clear Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) on working modalities and cost-sharing is a priority for 2026–30. MOUs protect both the network and its partners, and signal to funders that Prolinnova, though informally constituted, operates with professional rigour.

7.2 Four pillars of a diversified funding strategy

Prolinnova's resource mobilisation strategy for 2026–30 is built on four mutually reinforcing pillars. Together they are designed to reduce dependency on any single funding source, strengthen the network's financial resilience, and align funding with the values of equity and local ownership that define Prolinnova's identity.

The four pillars structure resource mobilisation around the reality that development funding environments are becoming more competitive and results-oriented, with a strong focus on short funding cycles, value for money, and clearly defined impact pathways. This often puts smaller, network-based, and participatory initiatives at a disadvantage, as their strengths lie in facilitation, learning, and long-term systems change rather than standardised delivery. Outcomes such as empowerment, knowledge co-production, and locally led innovation can be hard to measure, which reduces their perceived readiness for investment. At the same

time, growing global priorities around climate resilience, agroecology, equitable food systems, and locally led development create opportunities for organisations that can position grassroots innovation as a catalyst for broader policy, practice, and systemic transformation, supported by credible learning, partnerships, and evidence-based influence.

7.2.1 Pillar 1: Sustaining relationships with existing and trusted funders

The network's most reliable funding has come from donors who understand the long-term, process-oriented nature of LI/PID — funders who are willing to support a community of practice rather than a project with fixed deliverables. These relationships are among Prolinnova's most valuable assets. Maintaining and deepening them means regular substantive engagement, sharing evidence of impact in forms that speak to donors' own priorities, and involving trusted supporters in the network's learning and strategy processes where appropriate. It also means actively building the 'champion' relationships that have historically been critical to sustained funding — individuals within donor organisations who understand and advocate for Prolinnova's approach. As the network's centre of gravity shifts southward, (sub)regional coordinators and POG members are expected to play a growing role in these relationships alongside the Northern Focal Point and IST.

7.2.2 Pillar 2: Engaging philanthropic organisations and the private sector

The decline in official development assistance makes diversification toward philanthropic foundations and mission-aligned private sector actors essential. Foundations often fund on longer time horizons, are more willing to support organisational development, and are increasingly interested in food systems transformation and agroecology. The private sector — **particularly small enterprises and social businesses in the agri-food space — offers potential for partnership that is not purely grant-based.** However, Prolinnova must be selective: partnerships must align with the network's values of equity and community benefit and must not compromise its independence or create conflicts of interest with the farmer innovators and communities it serves. The network will develop specific criteria for private sector engagement to guide these decisions in the first year of the strategic period.

A key operational change to support this pillar is the development of a coordinated **funder engagement approach** that enables the network to approach funders collectively — as a consortium — rather than through fragmented, platform-by-platform interactions. Fragmented engagement not only reduces efficiency; it risks positioning different regions as competitors for the same funding pools. The IST will coordinate this approach, with designated representatives responsible for key donor relationships. Additionally, the POG and the IST will convene a **Fund-raising Committee**, comprising of Prolinnova members and/or supporters who are familiar with donor trends and mechanisms, have substantial experience in fund raising and have a broad network of contacts in the donor landscape.

7.2.3 Pillar 3: Building financial capacity from within

Prolinnova's most underutilised resource mobilisation asset is the innovative capacity of the farmers and communities it supports. Farmer innovators are not passive recipients of project funding; they have demonstrated abilities to organise, experiment and create value. The 2026–30 priority is to connect this capacity to sustainable financial mechanisms at community level, progressively reducing field-level dependency on external grants.

LISFs are the primary vehicle for this, and their development is addressed in detail under Strategic Direction 2. The resource mobilisation dimension is worth emphasising here: LISFs are not simply project budgets for farmer experimentation — they are a demonstration that communities can finance their own innovation processes. As LISFs develop revolving models linked to Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and local banks, and as farmer innovators develop social enterprises that generate income from the products of innovation, communities build a degree of financial autonomy that reduces pressure on the network's core budget over time.

Farmer innovators also have a direct advocacy role in resource mobilisation that is often overlooked. Prolinnova supports innovators and their communities to present their work to opinion leaders, local government and district authorities. Several CPs have found that demonstrated, tangible results at community level can unlock local government co-financing. This requires collective organisation: individual innovators rarely have the standing to influence government resource allocation, but organised communities — through producer groups, cooperatives and women's associations — do. Collectivising farmer voices is therefore a resource mobilisation strategy as much as it is an advocacy one.

Crowdsourcing is another stream of funding that could be tapped into by farmer innovators and their groups.

7.2.4 Pillar 4: Accessing national budgets and public finance

In many countries where Prolinnova works, national governments have made formal commitments to agroecology, smallholder agriculture and food system transformation through national development plans and continental frameworks such as the African Union's Malabo Declaration. These commitments create an opening for Prolinnova to access national budget allocations — not as a recipient of government grants, but as a partner that helps government agencies fulfil their own commitments. This requires CPs to develop sustained relationships with ministries of agriculture and national agricultural research systems, and to communicate Prolinnova's evidence base in language that resonates with national policy priorities. The network will support CPs to develop these relationships deliberately during the strategic period.

7.3 Institutional legitimacy and the capacity to fundraise

Across all four pillars, a precondition for success is that Prolinnova is recognised as a credible, legitimate and well-governed partner. This is partly a question of evidence — addressed in Strategic Direction 4 — and partly a question of institutional capacity. The network will invest in the organisational competencies needed to engage confidently with a wider range of funders: proposal writing, financial management, reporting and impact communication. This investment will be coordinated through the IST and built into the capacity-strengthening activities of Strategic Direction 1. Stability in funding also depends on stability in relationships, and relationships depend on people. Prolinnova has benefited from the long-term commitment of champions — within the network and among its supporters — who understand farmer-led innovation and advocate for it. As the network renews itself, it must renew these relationships too. A deliberate approach to succession, mentoring and knowledge transfer, both within the

network and in its funder relationships, is therefore part of the resource mobilisation strategy, not separate from it.

7.4 Long term efforts required to achieve these shifts

The directions outlined above reflect the network's principled choices and the realities of the development finance environment. In 2026–30, Prolinnova will pursue the funding it needs to fulfil its mission — despite the challenges involved, in ways that are consistent with what it stands for. Specifically, Prolinnova believes that developing community-level financial mechanisms — LISFs and social enterprise — are the right long-term direction. However, realistically, they take time to mature and cannot substitute for external funding in the short term. Similarly, the shift of fundraising responsibility toward the Global South, while essential for equity and sustainability, requires investment in capacity that must itself be funded.

8 Conclusion

Prolinnova was founded on a conviction that has only grown stronger over twenty-five years of practice: that small-scale farmers are not the passive recipients of agricultural knowledge, but its most vital producers. The network's work in promoting LI and PID has demonstrated, across Africa, and Asia that farmer-led research generates solutions that are technically sound, ecologically grounded and socially owned. These are the capacities that many formal research institutions, and university level programs — however well-resourced — still need to strengthen and apply.

The 2021–25 period tested the network's resilience and confirmed its adaptability. Despite the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic and a challenging funding environment, Prolinnova partners continued to identify and support farmer innovators, deepen the integration of LI/PID within partner organisations, and expand training capacity. Farmer innovation fairs became flagship network events. Evidence of PID's impact on livelihoods, nutrition, entrepreneurship and climate adaptation grew across multiple CPs. These are achievements on which the network can build. At the same time, the period surfaced clear challenges. Evidence generation has not kept pace with the ambition of the network's vision. Communication and digital presence remain insufficient to reach policymakers and funders at the scale required. Training capacity is constrained. Funding remains fragile and concentrated. These are not new challenges, but the 2026–30 strategy addresses them with renewed directness.

The six strategic directions set out in this document — (1) strengthening LI/PID for agroecological transformation, (2) sustaining LISFs, (3) building farmer innovator networks, (4) systematically tracking and documenting impact, (5) expanding policy influence, and (6) securing the network's growth and sustainability — form an integrated programme of work. They are grounded in Prolinnova's core values of equity, partnership, transparency and commitment, and aligned with the agroecology and food systems policies of the regions where the network operates. What makes this strategy distinctive is not its ambition but its source. It was shaped by CPs across three continents, by farmer innovators, by Friends of Prolinnova and by donors — a genuinely co-created roadmap. As the network enters its next strategic period, it does so with a clear sense of what it stands for, a realistic understanding of what it must improve, and the collective commitment that has sustained it since Rambouillet in 1999.