Farmer-managed funds for local innovation

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Why farmer-managed innovation funds?

• Research & extension still mainly technology transfer

• Farmers are prime source of local knowledge & innovation in development

• Funding mechanisms for R&D are still largely in researchers’ control

• We challenge how funding is channelled → to change the power balance
PROLINNOVA exploring complementary R&D funding mechanisms

- so farmers can decide what will be researched, how and by whom

- to make R&D more accountable to & relevant for smallholders

- to develop, test and adapt models for farmer-governed R&D that can be scaled up
Local Innovation Support Funds (LISFs)

- Piloted by PROLINNOVA partners in:
  Asia: Cambodia, Nepal
  Africa: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania & Uganda

- Main questions in the action learning:
  - Can funds for experimentation & learning be efficiently channelled through smallholder farmers?
  - Can this approach improve their livelihoods and their influence on mainstream R&D?

Nepalese researchers learn from farmer innovator
How does an LISF work?

- Local Fund Management Committee (FMC) makes open call for proposals
- Farmers submit simple proposals
- FMC uses its criteria to select grantees and provide resources
- Farmers lead (joint) research
- Farmer researchers share results
- Participatory M&E and impact assessment

Cambodian farmer explains her experiment
Main screening criteria similar across piloting countries

- Idea driven by applicant
- Innovation sound in economic, environmental & social terms
- Applicable by resource-poor
- Applicant willing to share results (public goods from public funds)
- Proposal for *experimentation and learning*, not farm investment
 Grants made in 8 pilot countries over 4 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of applications received</th>
<th>Percentage approved</th>
<th>Average grant size (Euro)</th>
<th>Range in grant size (Euro)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1224</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>5 – 1670</td>
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Use of funds as decided by FMCs:

1. Farmers’ own experimentation
2. Improving farmer innovations
3. Farmer-led experimentation with research & extension staff
4. Learning visits by farmers

Ethiopian woman compares her local “modern” beehive with introduced one
Participatory impact assessment

Involvement of different actors in LISF piloting helped to:

• Strengthen farmer self-organisation around managing local R&D and own innovation funds

• Build smallholders’ capacities to formulate own needs and access relevant information

• Increase smallholders’ confidence to interact with “outsiders” in joint innovation

• Stimulate interest of development agents and scientists to support farmer-led experimentation
Findings and lessons learnt

- Funds for locally relevant R&D can be handled locally.
- LISF needs to be custom-designed depending on local capacities, degree of organisation & support services.
- LISF works best when integrated into existing participatory programme that can give needed support.
- Involvement in LISF can enhance role of smallholders in governance of publicly funded R&D.
Policy implications

Scaling up LISF requires an enabling policy environment to:

• Allocate part of regular R&D funding to supporting local innovation and channelling it through LISFs, where they exist

• Develop locally specific forms of LISFs, where they don’t exist

• Encourage research and extension staff to support farmer-led experimentation by creating space for it in R&D programmes

Innovation fair celebrates farmer creativity and creates space for sharing
Vision

A world in which farmers play decisive roles in research and development for sustainable livelihoods.