

PROLINNOVA (PROmoting Local INNOVation)

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Promoting farmer innovation was one of the main themes at the recent Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) held on 21-23 May 2000 in Dresden, Germany. Over 400 participants from farmer organisations, NGOs, national and international research centres, and private industry concluded that a participatory approach to innovation development in agroecology should be widely promoted. Over the past year, NGOs from both developing and developed countries had discussed by Email and met in Rambouillet, France, to draw up a concept paper for a programme to promote innovation by farmers and their communities. This paper was enhanced further by incorporating comments solicited from various other NGOs by Email. The revised paper served as basis for discussion in Dresden.

A learning network

The main objective is to strengthen research and development partnerships and methods to promote local innovation in ecological agriculture and natural resource management (EA/NRM). A long-term aim is to institutionalise Prolinnova

Advancing PTD: a study and workshop

A growing number of organisations have become engaged in agricultural research and extension that involved farmers at all stages in the process and that are designed to strengthen local capacities to experiment and innovate. Many have developed variations on the "classical" PTD approach: using novel entry points (e.g. indigenous innovators), trying to speed up the process and developing new methods. Some promising efforts have been made to institutionalise PTD within large research, extension and training organisations.

In view of the heightened interest in promoting local innovation (Prolinnova), it is high time to document, compare and analyse these experiences, and to learn from them. The proposed study during 2000/2001 will culminate in a workshop in late 2001.

The organisers – IIRR (Philippines), CIIFAD (USA), ETC (Netherlands) and tINNOVATEc (Switzerland/Germany/Netherlands) – are keen to learn of advances in PTD that help advance the development and scaling-up of PTD. We are seeking new cases from people who have learned from and improved the PTD practices pioneered in the 1980s and early 1990s. Cases should cover several years' experience, and can come from both the South and the North.

If you would like to join this learning activity, please contact ETC Ecoculture, expressing your interest and including a short abstract of the case you would like to contribute. Contact: Ellen Radstake, ETC, POB 64, NL-3830 AB Leusden, Netherlands (office@etcnl.nl).

approaches into national programmes of research, development and education. The programme is envisaged as covering six major components:

- Identifying and documenting local innovations and innovation processes related to both agroecological techniques at field/farm level and institutional innovation in collective management of natural resources at landscape level
- Promoting farmer-extensionist-scientist partnerships to further develop local innovations and to scale-up innovation processes
- Training potential collaborators in these participatory approaches and methods
- Promoting the incorporation of Prolinnova into the teaching and research activities of institutions of higher learning
- Jointly analysing the approaches and methods used in the above-mentioned processes and their impacts
- Promoting regional and global R&D networks and the sharing of information on EA/NRM based on local innovation in similar agroecological zones or similar types of techniques or institutions.

Most activities will be implemented through national and regional sub-programmes, defined semi-autonomously and directly funded by different donors. These sub-programmes will be linked at a higher level, using mechanisms for sharing and mutual learning, such as web-based databanks, E-conferences, workshops, exchange visits and publications. Prolinnova will be essentially a learning network.

Apart from encouraging the launching of new programmes to promote farmer innovation in the various regions, Prolinnova will also seek collaboration with relevant existing programmes, databases and publications, e.g. Honeybee, ILEIA, ISWC, PFI, PRGA, and encourage their active involvement in the network.

Links with InterDev and PolicyNet

The Prolinnova initiative has been developed along with two other initiatives:

- InterDev, aimed at developing an internet-based system for documenting and sharing local innovations, initiatives and practice-proven techniques of EA/NRM; and
- PolicyNet, aimed at addressing policy and institutional issues to support local innovation processes, by way of relevant research and information dissemination.

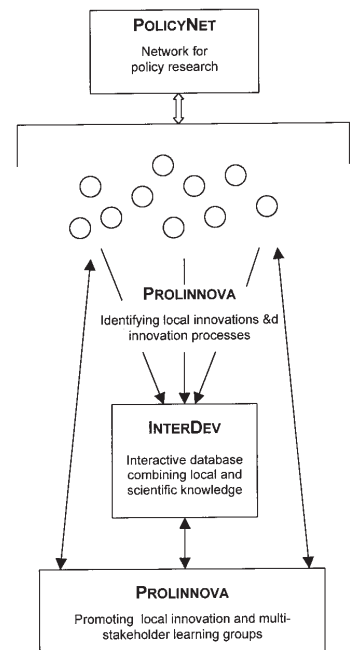


Figure 1: Mechanisms of knowledge management to promote innovation in ecological agriculture and natural resource management

InterDev will be an important platform for collecting and making available the lessons from Prolinnova, while PolicyNet will be vital for creating the political and institutional "space" to allow Prolinnova to blossom.

Initial inventory and consultation

The Rambouillet Group is currently developing an action plan to put the concepts into operation. Start-up activities include an inventory of existing programmes and databases on local innovation in EA/NRM and a consultation process with potential partners to review relevant experiences, analyse these jointly and identify gaps where supportive mechanisms can be introduced or strengthened. On this basis, partner institutions will design a more detailed Prolinnova programme.

This issue of the *ILEIA Newsletter* has already moved ahead in compiling experiences of discovering and promoting innovation by farmers. In the context of InterDev, ILEIA is setting up a website for continued documentation and discussion of relevant methods and processes.

All organisations interested in being actively involved in PROmoting Local INNOVation in AE/NRM are invited to contact Laurens van Veldhuizen, ETC Ecoculture, PO Box 64, NL-3830 AB Leusden, Netherlands (Lvan.veldhuizen@etcnl.nl).