

News from Prolinnova in April 2020 (in the era of Covid-19)

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In this time of lockdown almost worldwide because of Covid-19, most Prolinnova partner organisations promoting farmer-led innovation, research and development have not been able to travel to meet with their farmer partners face-to-face, but the farmers continue their work – including their innovation in the face of the new challenges posed by the virus and the lockdown – to produce the food that feeds the world: especially in the local food systems around them. The supporting organisations are trying to work from home, to the best of their capabilities, also depending on their Internet connectivity. They are using this period of confinement for reflection, planning, documentation, reporting and preparing for continued policy influence, e.g. through policy briefs and papers and events. We in our home offices in Germany and the Netherlands, respectively, also have time to report on recent developments in the Prolinnova network, all of which were discussed in a recent virtual meeting of the Prolinnova Oversight Group (POG).

Regionalisation of the Prolinnova network

In its strategic plan for 2016–20, the network envisaged the formation of regional and subregional platforms of multistakeholder Country Platforms (CPs) to enhance learning across countries and (sub)regions and to strengthen advocacy for mainstreaming the approach of promoting local innovation and farmer-led participatory research. This regionalisation process has started in Africa, thanks to funding through Misereor, which allows Subregional Coordinators (SRCs) in West & Central Africa (WCA) and in Eastern & Southern Africa (ESA) and taskforces in these two subregions, composed of persons nominated from each of the CPs in the respective subregions, to drive the process.

The **new SRC in WCA** as of 1 April 2020 is [Abdel-Karim Ali Mahamane](#). He succeeds Georges Djohy, who has been SRC since May 2017 and has taken on a new position in research. Originally from Niger, Abdel lives since 2003 in Senegal, where he obtained an MSc in Agronomy and a Master of Business Administration specialised in project management. He previously worked on various development issues, such as biofuels, climate change, waste management, food security and environmental governance within multistakeholder projects, especially with civil society organisations (CSOs). Because of the situation with Covid-19, he cannot yet visit the CPs in WCA, but he is holding virtual meetings with them and the WCA taskforce.

A **call for applications for a new SRC in ESA** has been made to replace [Brigid Letty](#) (South Africa), who will step down in mid-2020. Brigid had taken over the role on an interim basis after the resignation of Amanuel Assefa in early 2019 (Amanuel died later in the same year). The deadline for applications is 30 April 2020. Interviews with shortlisted candidates will be in early May so that the new SRC can start on 1 June, allowing Brigid one month to make the handover. Please share the [call](#) with suitable candidates.

Northern Focal Point and IST: The regionalised structures of the network have taken over many of the tasks of the former International Secretariat, particularly in terms of managing projects and funds. Global coordination is maintained through the virtual International Support Team (IST). The POG asked the [Agrecol Association for AgriCulture & Ecology](#) to serve as Northern Focal Point (NFP) for the Prolinnova network for communication with potential donors and other interested people in the Global North. Last year, the Agrecol Board and members agreed that Agrecol would take on this role. We (Ann in Germany and Chesha in the Netherlands) handle the communication for the NFP and work together with the other IST members: Annie Secretario (International Institute of Rural Reconstruction/IIRR, Philippines), Brigid Letty (Institute of Natural Resources/INR, South Africa) and Abdel Mahamane (AgriBioServices, Senegal).

African Regional Partners Workshop 2020: A Prolinnova International Partners Workshop (IPW) is held every second year, and regional workshops are held in between. The African Regional Partners Workshop was planned for October 2020 in Yaoundé, Cameroon, back-to-back with the annual meeting for the SULCI-FaNS project (see below) and a Cameroonian Farmer Innovation Fair (FIF). Jean-Bosco Etoa, coordinator of Prolinnova–Cameroon, and his team drew up a concept note (CN) and budget for the FIF, and are seeking funding inside and outside of Cameroon. Their preparations for the FIF have been slowed down because of the Covid-19 crisis. The POG has recommended to the team in Cameroon that the FIF, regional workshop and SULCI-FaNS meeting be postponed to the end of 2020 or early 2021.

Asia regional platform: The CPs in Asia have been planning to hold a regional FIF in the Philippines, but finding resources has been a challenge, even more so now that development funding is being realigned for Covid-19 interventions. Emily Monville of IIRR coordinates this platform.

Andes regional platform: The two CPs in the Andes (in Bolivia and Peru) have no current plans for joint activities. However, some CSOs in Central America (Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua) have expressed interest in linking up with Prolinnova. They will be briefed and encouraged in the coming weeks.

New Country Platforms (CPs)

As of April 2020, the POG has recognised a total of 21 CPs in the Prolinnova Community of Practice. Three new CPs have been welcomed in the last six months.

[Prolinnova–United Kingdom \(UK\)](#) is the first CP in the Global North: the Farmer-Led Innovation Network (FLIN), comprising over 20 organisations in England, Scotland and Wales, was accepted by the POG in April. This new CP is coordinated by Lisa Williams van Dijk (a POG member), who works with the Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester, and Exeter University in the UK. FLIN eventually hopes to set up a Europe-wide platform of people/organisations engaged in farmer-led research and innovation. There are already indications of interest in the UK and more widely in Europe in promoting this approach. The UK Government research agency Innovate UK seeks “end-user” engagement in proposals. The European Union (EU) supports Agricultural Innovation Platforms for interactive innovation projects with farmers in the driving seat. Many of the EU-funded Operational Groups led by farmers and small entrepreneurs are running with the concept, but few scientists know how to interact with them. Lisa also works with the EU-funded project LIAISON, which is developing courses to build formal scientists’ capacities to support farmer-led research and innovation and seeks to create an enabling policy environment for this approach. The POG welcomed Prolinnova–UK and regards this as an exciting development that will benefit the international network by creating opportunity for North–South learning and collaboration.

New CPs in [Zimbabwe](#) and [South India](#) were welcomed into the international network in November 2019 and February 2020, respectively. In both cases, the partners involved have several years, indeed decades, of experience in promoting local innovation by farmers in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resource management. For example, organisations in the Zimbabwe CP, coordinated by PELUM-Zimbabwe (PELUM stands for Participatory Ecological Land Use Management), have been giving the Phiri Award for farm and food innovators since 2014. The South Indian network, coordinated by Peermade Development Society, is working with support of the Innovation Fund of the Indian Ministry of Science and Technology. These new CPs will strengthen the subregional platform in ESA and the regional platform in Asia, respectively. They were already introduced to network members via the Googlegroup and the website – see the news items [New Prolinnova Country Platform in Zimbabwe!](#) and [Welcome to Prolinnova–South India!](#)

Externally funded projects under the Prolinnova umbrella

Many CPs operate with their own funds from partners in the CP, but there are also several externally funded projects, as follows:

SULCI-FaNS (Scaling Up Local Capacity to Innovate for Food and Nutrition Security)

This 3-year project (Oct 2019–Sept 2022) builds on the Proli-FaNS (Promoting local innovation for Food and Nutrition Security) project, which ran from August 2016–September 2019 with funding from Misereor through a grant from the “One World No Hunger” (SEWOH) initiative of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). It operated in several action-learning sites in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana and Kenya, and received a favourable external evaluation. The activities and achievements of Proli-FaNS can be found in reports on [the Proli-FaNS/SULCI-FaNS webpage](#). This includes the 39-page report [Collaboration between farmer innovators and formal scientists in Participatory Innovation Development](#) and a policy brief based on this, which will appear shortly.

The inception workshop for the SULCI-FaNS project, which involves partners in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana and Kenya, was held in the Mampuya Centre (Senegal) in December 2019. The project seeks to: a) develop the capacities of rural communities to innovate so as to improve food and nutrition security and nutritional diversity; b) to make women more widely recognised as innovators and supported in further developing their innovations; and c) to strengthen subregional Prolinnova platforms in Africa to enhance South–South learning and policy dialogue to institutionalise the participatory innovation development (PID) approach. Training in PID and gender was carried out in two workshops (English and French) and in some action-learning sites, but field activities are now on hold because of Covid-19. ACDEP (Association of Church-based Development NGOs), the organisation that hosts Prolinnova–Ghana, coordinated the earlier Proli-FaNS project and now coordinates SULCI-FaNS.

GALID (Gender Analysis & Local Innovation Development)

In late 2019, two trainers from KIT were in Kenya to follow up on the FAO-funded [GALID](#) training done in late 2018 to introduce the guidelines to a group of agricultural research and development practitioners involved in the SULCI-FaNS project. Each participant had prepared a post-training assignment at the end of the training workshop. The trainers visited them to find out about their experiences and challenges in integrating gender into their PID work and whether and how the guidelines had helped them. Based on this feedback, the trainers revised the guidelines and submitted the document to FAO for comments. Covid-19 grounded the FAO staff and created time for the guidelines to be read and approved. The publication *“Bringing women innovators to the fore: guidelines for gender-responsive farmer-led innovation and research”* (22pp) will soon be posted on the Prolinnova website and is already being used in training sessions, e.g. for SULCI-FaNS.

FaReNe (Farmer-led Research Networks)

In June 2019, the [FaReNe](#) project started a second 3-year phase, with funds from the McKnight Foundation, for work in Burkina Faso and Mali. The overall aim is to strengthen research networks led by farmers to facilitate development and assessment of options for agroecological intensification. In recent months, farmers in Burkina experimented with intercropping sorghum and cowpea, using effective microorganisms and compost to fertilise the soil, and increasing forage production from sorghum and cowpea. Farmers in Mali experimented with options for intercropping cowpea with sorghum or sesame. Local Innovation Support Funds are also being used to support initiatives by cooperatives and individual farmers, both women and men. This project is coordinated by World Neighbors in Burkina and by ADAF-Gallè in Mali.

Innovation in ethnoveterinary medicine (EVM)

The 3-year Misereor-funded project “Promoting ethnoveterinary medicine for sustainable animal husbandry practices in Northern Ghana” (Oct 2019–Sept 2022) is coordinated by ACDEP, working together with EVM practitioners, the Ghanaian Animal Research Institute and the Swiss Tropical & Public Health Institute (TPH). Farmers in three regions in northern Ghana have identified common livestock diseases, local treatments and EVM practitioners and innovators. The treatments are being documented and validated. Because of Covid-19, project implementation in the field has slowed down, but there are increased discussions for policy attention and support for traditional medicines to treat Covid-19.

Local innovation in water management in the Sahel / Promouvoir l'innovation locale dans la gestion de l'eau en agriculture familiale au Sahel (Proli-GEAFaSa)

This 3-year Misereor-funded project (Jan 2020–Dec 2022) operates in Burkina Faso and Senegal, led by the Senegalese NGO AgriBioServices. It aims to improve water management in the Sahelian drylands, building on local innovation. An inception workshop was held in December 2019 in Mampuya Centre. Training in PID and gender was given in late February 2020 for partners, including farmers, involved in both Proli-GEAFaSa and SULCI-FaNS. Field-level work had just started when movements were restricted because of Covid-19.

Tailor-Made Training Plus (TMT+) in Benin

This 2-year project funded by Nuffic (Netherlands Organisation for Internationalisation of Higher Education) is designed to build capacity of teachers in the University of Parakou and two agricultural colleges in north Benin to support social entrepreneurship based on local innovation for food and nutritional security. In late March 2020, the training and mentoring of 18 teachers in PID was scheduled, followed by a field visit to a SULCI-FaNS action-learning site in North Ghana, but was postponed because of Covid-19. There are plans to set up a CP in Benin to continue the work once this project is completed in 2022. A member of Prolinnova–Senegal – Djibril Thiam – will be co-trainer with Chesha in this project.

Tailor-Made Training (TMT) in Mozambique

This one-year training funded by Nuffic is meant to increase the capacity of Prolinnova–Mozambique partners in the PID approach. The project includes a training workshop followed by a 9-month period of learning through implementing pilot PID projects, with coaching from the trainers. The programme will conclude with a reflection workshop. The start-up training by Brigid and Chesha was scheduled for early April 2020 but was postponed because of Covid-19.

Projects and events in the pipeline

The Prolinnova partners, with support from the IST, including the SRCs in Africa, have developed several CNs and proposals that have been submitted to various donors:

Nuffic-supported PID training in Sudan and Southern Sudan

A proposal for a 2-year project to promote women's and youth innovation for food and nutrition security and community resilience was submitted to Nuffic on 2 April 2020. Chesha is collaborating with Fetien Abay (long-time partner in Prolinnova and now Vice-President for Research at Mekelle University in Ethiopia) to build capacities in educational institutions in Sudan and South Sudan to promote farmer innovation. They will be working through Prolinnova–Sudan and hope also to help build up a CP in Southern Sudan.

Local innovation to improve child nutrition in Benin and Kenya

Georges Djohy, former SRC for WCA, initiated this proposal on behalf of Prolinnova together with the German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture (DITSL) and several partners in Benin and Kenya. The pre-proposal for a 3-year project "NaviNut: Enhancing women's agency in navigating changing food environments to improve child nutrition in African drylands" was submitted to the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BML), which has invited DITSL (the lead partner) to prepare a full proposal.

BioSol4Rural in Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa & Uganda

Brigid Letty, SRC for ESA, involved several Prolinnova partners in developing a CN for a 5-year project "Improving rural livelihoods through biobased technologies & circular value chains in Africa" (BioSol4Rural) together with the University of Hohenheim, Germany, as lead partner, which submitted the CN to the EU Horizon 2020 programme for research and innovation in January 2020.

Building climate resilience of smallholder farmers through PID

In November 2019, Prolinnova partners in Cambodia, Nepal and the Philippines submitted to the Asia Pacific Network for Global Change Research a CN for a one-year project on "Building climate resilience of smallholder farmers through multistakeholder innovation development".

CP initiatives in fundraising

- **Prolinnova–Kenya** has submitted CNs for two projects: i) “Promoting local innovation for strengthened community resilience and adaptability to impact of climate change in informal settlements of Kisumu city” to Cities Alliance; and ii) “Lofoda goat meal for food security” to the Mohammed Bin Rasheed Initiative for Global Prosperity. Lofoda was developed by farmer innovator Joe Ouko (POG member).
- **Prolinnova–Uganda** partnered with the Technical University of Munich and several other organisations to submit a CN to Horizon 2020 for a project on “Traditional ecological & indigenous knowledge based bio-solutions & business models to diversify revenues in East African rural communities”.

Several other attempts at national or regional level in writing CNs and proposals to solicit external funding for Prolinnova activities were not successful, but they do bear witness to the initiatives of the Prolinnova partners in fundraising.

Agrecol–Prolinnova collaboration in pre-Tropentag workshop

The annual European Tropentag conference on research in tropical and subtropical agriculture, natural resource management and rural development is scheduled for September 2020 in Prague, Czechia, with the theme “Can agroecological farming feed the world? Farmers' and academia's view”. The organisers are planning to an opening plenary panel that includes several farmers. Prolinnova has suggested two woman farmers for this panel. Agrecol Association and Prolinnova are also proposing a pre-conference workshop on “Tried & tested ways to put agroecological behaviour & knowledge into practice: farmer-led innovation, experimentation & sharing in the tropics”, in which the farmers invited for the Tropentag opening will also take part. The workshop will bring examples from Africa, Asia and Latin America of how small-scale farmers have taken the lead in experimenting, innovating and sharing improvements in agroecology. It will also look into the role of external actors, e.g. in research, advisory and educational institutions, in supporting the farmers’ initiatives. Agrecol and Prolinnova are co-organising this workshop with the American NGO [A Growing Culture \(AGC\)](#); [AFSA](#) (Association for Food Sovereignty in Africa); and possibly also [Misereor](#).

Developing Prolinnova’s strategic plan for 2021–25

A team of Prolinnova partners from all the (sub) regions – coordinated by Joshua Zake of Prolinnova–Uganda – has developed a draft strategic plan for the period 2021–25, to follow up on the current strategic plan (2016–20). The POG has made comments on the draft, which will now be shared with the CPs for their comments. It is expected that the network will approve the document during the next face-to-face meeting (if possible) in Cameroon in late 2020.

Two new [Friends of Prolinnova](#)

This group of individuals supports the network in improving multistakeholder partnerships, strategy development, fundraising and public relations. The POG has now approved and welcomed two new members – Elske van der Fliert (University of Queensland, Australia) and Juergen Anthofer (BEAF/GIZ – German Advisory Service for Agricultural Research for Development/German Agency for International Cooperation) – both of whom had served in the POG up to mid-2019.