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Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships to Integrate Participatory Approaches into Institutions of Agricultural Research and Development

ANN WATERS-BAYER, LAURENS VAN VELDUIZEN, MARIANA WONGTSCHOWSKI, CHESHA WETTASINHA

ETC Foundation, ETC EcoCulture, Netherlands

Abstract

In order to be effective and sustainable, participatory approaches to research and development must be scaled out horizontally to reach broader constituencies and scaled up vertically to reach higher levels of management and policymaking. This can be achieved through a concerted effort of the major stakeholder groups, e.g. men and women farmers, extension agencies, development NGOs, researchers, universities, policymakers at various levels.

An international platform of civil-society organisations, called PROMoting Local INNOVAtion (PROLINNOVA), is stimulating the building of multi-stakeholder partnerships at national and sub-national level in order to institutionalise participatory approaches towards developing environmentally-sound use of natural resources. PROLINNOVA is currently active in nine countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nepal, Niger, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda). Stakeholders in each country have designed their own, unique country-level programme, based on local experience and history. In each case, the participatory design and implementation process is facilitated by a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) that brings together the different stakeholders to:

- collect local experiences in recognising farmer innovation and in promoting participatory technology/innovation development;
- analyse these experiences jointly; and
- develop action plans to improve, expand and integrate participatory approaches to farmer-led research and development in the major institutions of agricultural research, extension and education in their country.

These activities include action learning and policy dialogue to bring about organisational change. The learning and arguments are based on grassroots activities in promoting local innovation, achieved through recognising the dynamics of indigenous knowledge and facilitating farmer-led experimentation in collaboration with other stakeholders. Attention is given to both technical and socio-institutional innovations to improve agriculture and natural resource management.

The paper discusses the roles of the different stakeholders in these partnerships, including the benefits and constraints of facilitation by NGOs. It examines how this approach contributes to more dynamic and site-specific rural development processes and supportive

policies. It synthesises results of comparative analyses of nine country-level case studies in building multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable rural development carried out within the PROLINNOVA programme.

Keywords: Action learning, farmer innovation, institutional change, participatory research and development, partnerships, stakeholder interaction