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“Resilience of agricultural systems against crises”

Institutionalising Participatory Innovation Development in Agricultural Extension: Case Study of Tahtay Maychew, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Since 2005, the Prolinnova-Ethiopia multistakeholder platform has promoted participatory approaches in agricultural research and development and worked towards institutionalisation of participatory innovation development (PID) in governmental and non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations and institutions of higher education in Ethiopia. A study of the experience of Tahtay Maychew District Office of Agriculture, a partner of Prolinnova-Ethiopia in Tigray Region in northern Ethiopia, revealed that innovations developed by local farmers are being actively promoted by extension agents and subject-matter specialists in the Office of Agriculture. Moreover, this activity is becoming part of their daily routine in extension work, even though the Tigray Regional Bureau of Agriculture does not directly support the approach with structural, financial and human resources. The progress towards institutionalising PID within the extension service at district level was facilitated by the fact that the NGO coordinating the Prolinnova-Ethiopia platform in Tigray Region encouraged the Office of Agriculture to assume full responsibility to implement the activities of identifying local innovation and promoting farmer-led experimentation processes in a way that fitted into the regular extension activities. The study found that the major challenges faced by Prolinnova partners in Tigray Region for better institutionalisation of this approach are: i) the relatively weak collaboration among platform partners other than the Office of Agriculture and the coordinating NGO; and ii) the platform's lack of a clear strategy for institutionalising PID. More active collaboration and linkages are needed at all levels within the region, instead of leaving all the responsibility only with the district-level extension agents. A change in attitude towards the potential of PID as an approach to extension is still needed among decision-makers at higher levels in the Tigray Bureau of Agriculture if sustainable institutionalisation of PID is to be achieved.

Keywords: Ethiopia, multi-stakeholder, participatory innovation development, Prolinnova