

Synergies between supporting endogenous development and participatory innovation: Development as methodologies for understanding and improving rural livelihoods

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Local innovation and participatory innovation development

This chapter explores the synergies that exist between two development approaches that aim to improve the livelihoods of the rural poor: participatory innovation development and the support/enhancement of endogenous development. Local innovation can be defined as the process by which people in a given social group, using their own resources, knowledge and initiative, develop new and better ways of doing things (better implying reduced time, reduced cost, reduced environmental impact, improved efficiency and so on). It is the process whereby changes occur within a social group through their own initiative as they (or individuals) learn from their own experiences (informal experimentation) and incorporate knowledge obtained from other sources. Local innovation can be seen as the process by which communities expand the boundaries of their indigenous knowledge (Waters-Bayer and van Veldhuizen, 2004).

The process of joint learning and experimentation that is aimed at improving or adapting a local innovation is known as participatory innovation development (PID). This approach builds on existing ideas and motivations and leads to a development and research agenda that is based on what people are already doing to improve their livelihoods and solve their problems. While the local innovation is seen as the starting point, it is understood that joint experimentation could involve the introduction of external ideas to improve on the local innovation.

The basis for this development approach is the understanding that local innovations and indigenous knowledge systems are far more appropriate to most rural situations than external technologies because they have developed within the given set of circumstances. By external technologies, we refer to technologies such as those developed on research stations as well as those that originate from other communities, which may or may not be appropriate even though they are farmer derived.

Introduction to PROLINNOVA

PID is one of the approaches promoted by the global partnership, PROLINNOVA. The name 'PROLINNOVA' is a synthesis of '*Promoting Local Innovation*', and the programme promotes local innovation in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural

resource management. PROLINNOVA is an international NGO-led network that involves nine country programmes in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Apart from the funded PROLINNOVA programme, there are additional organizations that network and share experiences, thus expanding the PROLINNOVA community of practice. The main aim of PROLINNOVA is to scale up and institutionalize participatory, farmer-led research and extension approaches that focus on the further development of local innovation.

PROLINNOVA was conceived in 1999 when a range of NGOs from around the world met in France to identify ways to scale up participatory approaches to agricultural research for development (ARD). A decision was taken at the meeting to launch PROLINNOVA. ETC Ecoculture, a Netherlands-based NGO, was asked to facilitate this process, with support from multi-stakeholder partnerships in the various countries involved. A number of the key organizations based in Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda started to collect experiences in local innovation and PID with funding from IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) and held a number of workshops to share such experiences and develop action plans for scaling up participatory approaches to farmer-led ARD. Later in 2003, funding was obtained from DGIS (Netherlands Directorate General for International Cooperation) to implement these plans and to support similar processes in a number of other countries (Cambodia, Nepal, Niger, South Africa, Sudan and Tanzania).

PROLINNOVA country programmes

PROLINNOVA is organized in a very decentralized way in which country programmes can set their own priorities, yet their work plans do share the following common elements:

- The compilation of inventories/catalogues or databases of local innovations and innovators;
- Creating opportunities for farmers, development agents, extension staff and researchers to engage in discussion and to undertake joint learning and experimentation, the starting point being jointly prioritized local innovations;
- Establishing multi-stakeholder forums (at a national and sub-national level) to broaden awareness and appreciation of local innovation and PID and to share local innovations;
- Holding training (sharing and learning) workshops to build the capacity of various stakeholders (farmers, researchers and extension) to identify and document innovations and to engage in PID;
- A participatory monitoring and evaluation process that seeks to determine the impact and outcomes of the various country programme activities;
- Awareness creation about the opportunities for sustainable development provided by local innovation and PID;
- Engaging in policy dialogue in order to institutionalize/integrate these farmer-led participatory approaches into research, extension and education by creating a favourable policy environment.

The country programmes, each facilitated by a local NGO, are supported by the International Support Team, which is involved in a range of activities including networking, arranging capacity building opportunities and fund raising. At a higher

level, a structure has been established as a governance mechanism to ensure accountability. This is known as the PROLINNOVA Oversight Group and also includes external persons not involved with the programme. Annual international workshops of stakeholders from the various countries have been held to ensure that the design and ongoing evaluation of the global partnership programme has been undertaken in a participatory manner.

Endogenous development

Endogenous development ('development from within') is an approach to improving livelihoods. Endogenous development is said to be a continuous process of healing, adaptation and innovation starting from within the community and controlled by local actors. Indigenous knowledge and value systems, with their technical, social and spiritual dimensions are seen as the starting point for development (Haverkort et al, 2003). COMPAS, also an international NGO-led network funded by DGIS, promotes endogenous development and aims to understand the diversity of people's knowledge and values, as a starting point for sustainable rural development.

In the rest of the chapters in this book, we present how people who have worked with the PID approach look at endogenous development and its strengths and weaknesses as compared to their own work. In this comparison, we prefer to use the term 'supporting endogenous development' rather than 'endogenous development'. Endogenous development is development that takes place without, and sometimes with, the support of external players. We want to compare PID and supporting endogenous development as two development approaches.

Supporting endogenous development and participatory innovation development: Common ground

First of all it is important to emphasize the importance of the common ground between support to endogenous development and PID. Both approaches seek to overcome poverty and improve the livelihoods of the rural poor through participatory methodologies that acknowledge the complexities of the local situation and also aim to prevent ecological destruction.

PID and supporting endogenous development share an important fundamental principle, which is that participatory approaches are people- or community-driven, with outside agencies providing a support role only. Both approaches thus have a longer term vision of empowering communities. Another common principle that they share is an acceptance of local knowledge and practices, as well as local organizations and institutions being relevant in their own right and a sound starting point for development efforts.

The following statement contained within the COMPAS code of conduct (Haverkort et al., 2003) summarizes the common concern:

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that the partners have agreed to learn emphatically from the local knowledge system, analyse it and enter into a respectful dialogue about the positive and negative aspects... and... the possibilities for improvement.

A more detailed analysis of key elements of the two approaches, following the supporting endogenous development framework (Haverkort et al, 2003) (see Table 1), also illustrates how the two approaches have many key concerns in common.

| Key aspects of supporting endogenous development | Corresponding activities, aims and philosophies of PROLINNOVA |
|--|--|
| <p>Building on local needs There is an understanding that needs are diverse (even within a given community) and that they are not limited to income but may involve other more important issues such as social cohesion, health and harmonious relationships with the spiritual world</p> | <p>PROLINNOVA aims to contribute to wider development objectives than just increased incomes (poverty reduction, sustainable resource use, food security and competitiveness of small and medium businesses) and seeks to demonstrate the effectiveness of user-led innovation for sustainable development</p> |
| <p>Improving local knowledge and practices COMPAS supports people to adapt their practices to meet challenges and supports the development of indigenous knowledge and practices; the approach acknowledges the ability of rural communities to design and test innovations, and to exchange experiences</p> | <p>PROLINNOVA promotes participatory innovation development as a mechanism for improving local knowledge and practices as well as sharing and learning between farmers</p> |
| <p>Local control of development options COMPAS seeks to enhance local control and decision-making, so that the community is empowered to make its own decisions</p> | <p>PROLINNOVA seeks to ensure that farmers are real partners and that participatory innovation development process is farmer-led; Decentralized funding mechanisms to promote local innovation are to be piloted (the idea being that a lack of resources sometimes restricts farmers' ability to innovate and that by addressing these issues, the development process will be accelerated)</p> |
| <p>Identification of new development niches COMPAS aims to identify income generating opportunities around local products or resources (agro-tourism, local crafts, local breeds and so on)</p> | |
| <p>Selective use of external resources COMPAS appreciates that situations are encountered when the introduction of external ideas/resources can be beneficial in overcoming limitations associated with local technologies/practices</p> | <p>PROLINNOVA supports the process of PID, which is the further development or improvement of local innovations. The opportunity for incorporating external knowledge and ideas to strengthen local innovations through a joint experimentation process is acknowledged</p> |

| Key aspects of supporting endogenous development | Corresponding activities, aims and philosophies of PROLINNOVA |
|---|--|
| Retention of benefits in the local area COMPAS supports activities that retain rather than extract benefits from the community (this includes the protection of intellectual property rights) | PROLINNOVA promotes the sharing of knowledge and ideas if it is to benefit the livelihoods of other rural communities. All innovations that are documented acknowledge the origin and ownership thereof, and it is seen as a mechanism for the passive protection of people's rights |
| Exchange and learning between local cultures COMPAS provides a forum for exchanging ideas on research, participatory approaches and development resulting from local conditions. It is acknowledged that dialogue can reveal similarities in circumstances and technologies and opportunities for learning | The PROLINNOVA country programmes have specifically focused on establishing forums/ platforms that allow farmers to interact and share ideas |
| Training and capacity building COMPAS supports capacity building of field staff to ensure that they can engage around social, economic and cultural issues (including the methods to enhance the dynamics of local knowledge), and not just technical issues | PROLINNOVA seeks to create awareness and increase the capacities of all stakeholders (farmers, researchers, extensionists and policy-makers) in participatory approaches (especially PID) and encourages 'training of trainers' |
| Networking and strategic partnerships The importance of linking regional, national and international processes is acknowledged, as are the opportunities that strategic partnerships offer for influencing the policy environment | PROLINNOVA seeks to establish platforms (local, regional, national and international) for reflection, analysis and learning; PROLINNOVA also seeks to influence the policy environment through strategic national and regional dialogue so that participatory approaches to farmer-led innovation and experimentation are integrated into research, extension and education institutions. The establishment of strategic partnerships is seen as an important mechanism for achieving this |
| Understanding systems of knowing and learning It is acknowledged that a good understanding of traditional knowledge systems is essential for international cooperation and research as it impacts, for example, on the interpretation of research results | PROLINNOVA seeks to build strong farmer-extension-researcher partnerships. This would require a mechanism (through communication) for improving outsiders' understanding of communities systems of knowing and learning |

Table 1 Commonalities (and potential synergies) between the methodologies supported by COMPAS and PROLINNOVA

Complementarities

Having said all this, a lot can be learned from exploring the differences between the two approaches and seeking opportunities where they can complement each other. Table 2 is a first effort from our side as a starting point for discussion.

| | Supporting endogenous development | Participatory innovation development |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| Distinguishing features | Socio-cultural and spiritual dimensions are seen to be as central in development efforts as the economic/material dimensions (these three dimensions are considered to be relevant) | Building the capacity of farmers to innovate is seen as the moving force in development efforts |
| Understanding indigenous knowledge | Respect for indigenous knowledge, with its own dynamics, and the need to consider it in development efforts | Emphasis is on the dynamic character of indigenous knowledge through local innovation |
| Methodology development | Strong on central philosophies, wide variety of methods and approaches under this, not always elaborated in detail | Includes a variety of operational methods and tools most of which have been well documented |
| Empowerment focus | Acknowledge, revitalize and strengthening traditional leadership to regain its role and move development process in concert with other stakeholders | Capacity building of farmers and communities to innovate; sustainable linkages with support agents |
| Development niches | Actively seek to identify opportunities for exploring development niches, such as ecotourism opportunities or local breeds or foods that offer opportunities for income generation | There has not been a focus on commercialization of innovations to date, but this could be explored although sharing of ideas for the benefit of all rural communities is generally encouraged |

Table 2 Complementarities of participatory innovation development and supporting endogenous development

What does PID bring to supporting endogenous development?

Within the general dynamics of indigenous knowledge, which see communities adapting knowledge systems to changing local conditions, there are often individuals or groups within a community who appear to be actively innovative. Often these individuals lead the process whereby new technologies are developed/introduced and institutionalized. They try out new things, conduct informal experiments, adapt local practices and indigenous knowledge and come up with solutions to problems or challenges they are encountering. Other people may then adopt these new innovations and over time they may become integrated into local practices. Such individuals, who have this ability to innovate, are seen as key resources when working rural with communities to improve their livelihoods.

PID has a very strong focus on establishing multi-stakeholder relationships right from the start and seeks to build capacity of all stakeholders, not just the support NGOs. It includes policy-makers and actively supports 'training of trainers'

programmes. The fact that the methodology is generally well developed and translated in practical methods and tools makes it quite accessible to the average extension or research staff.

What does supporting endogenous development bring to PID?

Endogenous development appreciates that farmers and/or users of natural resources are operating within a situation that is moulded not only by environmental and social factors, but also by spiritual and cultural factors. PID acknowledges that the development/enhancement of both hard and soft technologies (for example, systems of organizing farmers or marketing produce) must take cognisance of the social environment, but does not focus to the same extent as endogenous development on the cultural and/or spiritual element. Traditional leaders and institutions also play a much lesser role though they are included in the process when felt appropriate.

Endogenous development brings attention to the existence and importance of traditional leaders, culture and diversity. The approach acknowledges that due to the existence of biocultural diversity, there is a need for methodological diversity of extension and research approaches used in various locations and communities.

The existing interplay between local innovation and spiritual/cultural aspects

During PID sharing and learning workshops for farmers, researchers and development practitioners that have been held in various countries by PROLINNOVA, there have always been field visits and assignments that have involved the identification of local innovators and innovations. A number of the innovations that have been identified have highlighted the interplay that exists between culture and local innovation in the field of agriculture and natural resource management.

During a workshop in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa, in March 2006, one of the innovations visited on the fieldtrip was a rain-stopping practice used by a woman to prevent rainfall events during occasions such as weddings or funerals. Discussion followed regarding whether this was a local innovation or indigenous knowledge or a cultural practice. Since it is understood that the process definitely involves some sort of engagement of the ancestors who then play a role in preventing the rain, the activity definitely has a spiritual aspect. While such an activity may not be one that researchers feel they can take forward through experimentation, documentation of it has led to an awareness of the cultural dimension of local knowledge.

In Msinga, a rural region of South Africa, a situation was encountered where a man had taken up weaving grass mats, a practice that is generally perceived to be women's work. He was selling the mats to generate income and improve the situation for his family. His behaviour was seen to be innovative, and he was adapting local customs/cultures in order to be able to meet the needs of his family.

The impact of HIV/Aids on rural communities cannot be underplayed, and it has resulted in a wide range of innovations as people find ways to cope with the associated challenges, which include the lack of strength to undertake tasks and the increased number of funerals that families must finance and cater for. In one community, for example, people are resorting to buying the necessary meat from a

butcher, rather than carrying out ritual slaughters because animal numbers have been severely depleted by the recent increase in the number of HIV-related deaths. These are examples of cultural practices that are adapting to meet the challenges that are being encountered.

Support of bio-cultural diversity and rural livelihoods

Improving rural livelihoods requires understanding the factors that interplay to drive local practices and knowledge systems and appreciating the diversity that exists between and within rural communities.

In overcoming challenges that they are encountering, farmers normally work within the given spiritual and cultural context, adhering to traditional laws and practices. For example, in Zulu communities in South Africa, women are not allowed to enter the cattle kraal due to its association with the ancestors. Cattle owners would normally develop solutions that take cognisance of this, unless the innovation is in fact related to breaking the traditional gender roles.

Joint experimentation would definitely take cognisance of such norms through dialogue between farmers and development practitioners. It becomes clear why farmers need to drive the process if appropriate systems and technologies are to be developed.

Conclusion

Endogenous development and participatory innovation development have some relevant differences, but also many aspects in common. They both appreciate that local knowledge systems develop as a result of the interplay between social, cultural, environmental and spiritual factors (endogenous development) and are often well adapted to local conditions. Research and extension practitioners, who are also a source of ideas and technologies, should take cognisance of, and appreciate, the wealth of local knowledge that already exists.

Both approaches see farmers or local communities driving the development process. PID brings with it an appreciation of the role that local innovation and informal experimentation can play in allowing communities to adapt to new challenges, as well as the opportunities that improvements of innovations through joint experimentation can offer.

In future dialogue, PROLINNOVA and COMPAS need to engage around the concept of local innovation and the methodologies that are being used, as well as the importance of recognizing the diversity of local values and culture.

References

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