

N2Africa Podcaster 20 Special Issue

July 2013

Prem Warrior and N2Africa

This is a Special Podcaster Edition to thank Prem Warrior for his inspiration, support and friendship over the past five years. It has been a special journey for Nteranya Sangina and myself – and the many others whose lives Prem has touched. We will miss him!

I first met Prem in April 2008 at a convening on biological N_2 -fixation at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle. This was the start of an intensive and hugely fruitful interaction. The convening had been organised by Yvonne Pinto with my assistance, and brought together experts on N_2 -fixation from all over the world. The aim of the convening was to explore what all of the past research on N_2 -fixation could offer in terms of improving the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in the tropics. Prem had just joined the foundation the week before so N_2 -fixation has been part of his journey throughout the past five years. A month or so after the convening, Prem contacted me and asked me if I would be interested in leading an initiative to build a grant and this was the start of the process that led to N2Africa. The gestation period was fairly long – with detailed consultations in Wageningen, at the African Association of Biological Nitrogen Fixation (AABNF) meeting in Tunisia in December 2008, leading up to a planning workshop in Mombasa (see photos), proposal submission in July 2008 after Nteranya Sangina and I had spent some days in Seattle with Prem and others to seek alignment of objectives and finalize the proposal. At the same time I had to opportunity to lead a discussion session with Bill Gates on the wonders of N_2 -fixation.

Since then we have worked closely together to a common goal – of *Putting nitrogen fixation to work for smallholder*



N2Africa proposal writing workshop with partners, Mombasa, February 2009

farmers in Africa. Early after the project inception, Prem and I travelled through Mozambique and Zimbabwe together for a whole week – meeting farmers and seeing the first seeds of our work emerging! I remember at the end of the trip Prem saying how it had changed his picture of smallholder agriculture completely. Learning of the challenges faced by smallholders at first hand further strengthened his resolve to keep us on our toes and ensure that we delivered on our promises.

It is hard to summarise our common journey. Prem has always been absolutely open and firm with us, pushing hard and not accepting readily when things are inevitably delayed. Yet at the same time he has always been tremendously supportive of our work, going out of his way to invite us to speak in Seattle to share our experiences with the



Putting nitrogen fixation to work for smallholder farmers in Africa

foundation staff. Always being available on the phone at any time to discuss and advise. His close attention to detail combined with a 'hands off' approach in trusting us to execute the project has been much appreciated. We simply run out of superlatives!

As the first phase of N2Africa is drawing to a successful close, and we are in the throes of writing a proposal for the second phase, we hope that Prem can look back at this period with satisfaction and pleasure. Certainly Prem has become a personal friend for Sanginga and I, always

Prem and COMPRO

I was in a plane when Prem called confirming that the second phase of the COMPRO project ('Institutionalization of quality assurance mechanism and dissemination of top quality commercial products to increase crop yields and improve food security of smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa – COMPRO-II') had been approved. I was again in a plane when Prem called to inform that he was leaving the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Excellent and depressing news and all that before the respective flights took off!

Prem was right to put his heart and soul behind the main goals of the COMPRO project i.e. ensuring commercial fertilizers are safe to human, animal, plants and the environment, efficacious for the intended purpose, properly labeled to protect end-users against fraud and product misrepresentation, and consequently create a leveled playing field for the industry. His main vision for the COMPRO project,



Prem Warrior during the opening ceremony of the greenhouse at Moi University (Eldoret, Kenya) under COMPRO-I

asking after our families and sharing his own stories. We hope sincerely to continue both our professional and personal contacts in the future.

On behalf of all of the wider N2Africa community we express our deep gratitude to Prem. Thank you for believing in us – and you must join us for the closing workshop of N2Africa Phase I at the end of October.

Ken Giller and Nteranya Sanginga



as emphasized during the steering advisory committee (SAC) meeting in January 2013 (see photograph), was to put in place proper tools and capacity for adequate marketplace surveillance to prevent companies making profit on the back of resource-poor farmers by marketing inefficacious and non-profitable bio-fertilizers and related commercial products. Prem took us on a path to transform the first phase of the project from a research-driven initiative to an initiative that will have a lasting legacy. Prem's relationship with the COMPRO team was based on friendship and trust, but with the necessary 'hard talk' to ensure that the project work streams stay on track.

We sincerely hope to be able to continue relying on Prem's vast experience with bio-fertilizer production and quality control to the benefit of many small-holder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa and wish him success with all his future endeavours.

Bernard Vanlauwe on behalf of the COMPRO team

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