

Second virtual training workshop in Benin on promoting social entrepreneurship based on local innovation: multi-stakeholder partnerships and participatory innovation development (PID)

The project “Capacity building of agricultural high school teachers to support social entrepreneurship based on local innovation for food and nutrition security” (OKP/TMT+ 10101-2817), led by the Faculty of Agronomy of the University of Parakou (Benin), continues to benefit from the support of its international partners, the PROLINNOVA international network, the NGO AgriBioServices (Senegal), the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT, Netherlands) and the Orange Knowledge Programme of Nuffic (Netherlands), for its effective and efficient implementation in the particularly difficult context of COVID-19.

In this context, a second virtual workshop was held on Friday, 23 October 2020 at the Hotel Séro Kora 3 in Parakou (Benin). This meeting mobilised the 18 trainees initially selected (7 women and 11 men), including six from the Agricultural High School of Kika, six from the Agricultural High School of Ina and six from the University of Parakou. Two national experts, Georges Djohy and Honorat Edja, facilitated the workshop at the local level, and two international experts, Djibril Thiam and Chesha Wettasinha, facilitated two new modules, notably on multistakeholder partnerships and participatory innovation development (PID). This session also provided an opportunity for participants to present the results of their individual assignments on identifying and documenting local innovations, through a poster exhibition.

The principals of the two Agricultural High Schools graced the occasion and supported the efforts being made to provide their teaching staff with these new approaches that would enrich their knowledge and skills.



Participants in the workshop (Photo: Georges Djohy)

Poster exhibition of local innovations

Each of the 18 trainees identified and documented a local innovation as their homework assignment after the first virtual workshop held in September 2020. Each trainee prepared a poster on the documented local innovation. The posters were exhibited in the training venue. After a short recap of the first workshop, each trainee presented the documented local innovation to the others using his/her poster. These local innovations are mostly oriented towards food and nutrition security and could be classified into three categories:

Local innovations in crop production

The eight local innovations in this category took into account both the production and conservation of vegetables, cereals and other agricultural products:

- Using mosquito nets and waste cardboard in the fight against cabbage pests;
- Above-ground market gardening through the recycling of empty bags of Dangote cement;
- Conserving cowpea by reusing empty 25-litre vegetable oil cans;
- Using wood shavings to cover the boards of market gardening;
- Using sawdust in nursery and market gardening substrates;
- Growing pineapples in an area where it is not usually grown, by hormone treatment with carbides and petroleum on pineapple waste;
- Producing and applying an organic fertiliser for market gardening;
- Installing a strip-irrigation system for market gardening.

Local innovations in animal and fish production

These were four in number and covered ruminant feeding, incubation of poultry eggs and fish feeding:

- Storing crop residues on walls and ceilings for cattle feed;
- Adapting a traditional incubator for incubation of guinea fowl eggs;
- Making an artisanal oil-based incubator from empty motorcycle crates of Chinese origin;
- Making a manual pelletiser to improve fish feeding.

Local innovations in food processing

There were six in this category and covered flour, condiments and antiseptic products:

- Making antiseptic products based on bee propolis;
- Remodelling and colouring soybean cheese to improve its presentation and marketing;
- Deodorising and conserving the condiment “*afitin*” based on *nere* beans (*dawadawa*) using ash, clay and chilli pepper;
- Baking soybean biscuits in an artisanal oven;
- Preparing improved “*gari*” (cassava flour) with tropical fruits;
- Making flour enriched with nutritional supplements for feeding children.

Session on multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs)

This session was presented by Djibril Thiam of the NGO AgriBioServices, a member of PROLINNOVA–Senegal. It addressed the definition, forms, characteristics, challenges, composition and operationalisation of a MSP, as well as the key values of PROLINNOVA. After his presentation, a group exercise was carried out, allowing participants divided into three sub-groups to reflect together and present the advantages of working in MSPs. Thus, in 15 minutes of groupwork, participants found that complementarity, networking, sharing of experiences, mutual learning and reduction of personal effort were the main advantages of MSPs.



Participants engaged in groupwork (Photo: Georges Djohy)

Session on participatory innovation development (PID)

The PID session was facilitated by Chesha Wettasinha, advisor at KIT and member of the International Support Team of PROLINNOVA. The main points discussed were:

- different levels of participation;
- differences between farmers' own research and farmer-led joint research;
- differences between farmers' research and formal scientific research;
- stakeholders in farmer-led joint research;
- process of PID or farmer-led joint experimentation.

After these different sessions, Georges Djohy briefed the trainees on the content of their next post-training assignment, this time in three sub-groups, respectively from Kika, Ina and the University of Parakou. The teams are expected to simulate a PID process by selecting one of the local innovations documented by one of them.

The workshop participants gave a positive evaluation of the workshop sessions on all aspects of organisation and logistics, content, format and delivery, and requested improvement in internet connectivity and sound.

The workshop was concluded with an address by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Parakou in charge of Inter-University Cooperation, Partnership and Professional Insertion (VR-CIPIP), Ansèque Gomez, who appreciated the efforts of the project team members to implement the training programme and achieve results in this constraining context of COVID-19, and wished a long and fruitful collaboration between the different partners involved. The event was covered and broadcast by the local print media with a video clip made by a local videographer.