



West and Central Africa PROLINNOVA Platform (WeCAPP)

Plateforme PROLINNOVA d'Afrique Occidentale et Centrale (PPAOC)



BACK-TO-OFFICE REPORT – VISIT TO CAMEROON COUNTRY PLATFORM

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1. Introduction

The visit to PROLINNOVA–Cameroon was mainly aimed at allowing the new Subregional Coordinator (SRC) – who is still unknown to most partners in the Country Platforms (CPs) in West and Central Africa – to establish contact with the CPs in WeCAPP/ PPAOC. This will help lay the basis for good collaboration over the next three years. It will also provide an opportunity to inform the CP about the PROLINNOVA network’s organisational and operational guidelines and thus help correct the anomalies in the CP, if any. The local visits and exchanges with the partners were meant to make it possible more specifically to:

- Get to know the CP coordinators and partners
- Investigate the organisation and functioning of the CP
- Identify difficulties encountered by the CP
- Inform and sensitise the CP coordinators and partners with regard to the PROLINNOVA network’s guidelines, the support they can expect from the SRC and the prospects and plans in terms of regionalisation and transfer of international PROLINNOVA bodies to the South
- Assess progress / monitor and backstop Proli-FaNS field activities including Participatory Innovation Development (PID).

2. Expected results

The expected results of this visit were:

- The CP and the SRC know each other better and the bases for their collaboration are clearly established
- Anomalies with regard to structure and functioning of the CP are identified and an action plan is jointly agreed with the CP coordinators and governance structures for their correction
- Difficulties of the CP with regards to platform activities and Proli-FaNS implementation are known and solutions are suggested
- The CP has a better knowledge of the PROLINNOVA guidelines and are in a better position to respect them
- The CP has a better knowledge of the challenges related to the regionalisation and Southernisation of PROLINNOVA, and undertakes to play its roles to overcome these challenges

3. Activities performed

The main activities carried out during the Cameroon mission are summarised as follows:

3.1. Tuesday 5 December 2017

This was the day of travel from Cotonou (Benin) to Yaoundé (Cameroon). The mission really started on the second day, i.e. 6 December 2017.

3.2. Wednesday 6 December 2017

I held at COSADER's head office a working session with the leaders of PROLINNOVA-Cameroon (Photo 1). Those present were the Platform Coordinator (Jean Bosco Etoa), the Administrative and Financial Officer (Chantale Ngo Bonga) and the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Officer for the Proli-FaNS project (Bwebeyupu Yanziya Amina). This meeting was open to all other members of the technical team and the National Steering Committee (NSC) of the CP, but there were several contingencies that prevented discussion in a larger group. However, very fruitful exchanges took place with the three people mentioned above, who are the most informed actors in the implementation of the Proli-FaNS project.

During this session, my hosts and I introduced ourselves to each other, to get to know each other better. Etoa presented in detail the history of PROLINNOVA-Cameroon, its major achievements and challenges. It was clear from his explanations that the Cameroon CP experienced some difficulties because of the lack of external support that could facilitate the implementation of various activities to promote local innovation and PID. Most actors, who were initially very committed to promoting local innovation, became discouraged over time, leaving from 2011 to 2016 only an irreducible minimum of people who played the most important roles for the survival of the network.

In this context, the involvement of the CP in the Proli-FaNS project has been a major determinant for the revival of activities and is an important source of motivation and remobilisation of local actors for the promotion of local innovation in Cameroon. Although the implementation of Proli-FaNS was initially confronted with some misunderstandings and "conflicts", the actors reassured me that everything was back in order, the actors had reached agreement and the Proli-FaNS activities are taking place with great determination in a peaceful environment. The innovation catalogue printed and shared with me on this occasion is a tangible proof of the efforts made not only to achieve the objectives of the Proli-FaNS project, but also and especially to develop the CP itself, which plans to play a decisive role in promoting local innovation and institutionalising PID in Cameroon.

Chantale Ngo Bonga explained the administrative and financial management of the platform in general and that of the Proli-FaNS project in particular. The objective was to allow me to figure out if the principles of good governance advocated in the PROLINNOVA international network are respected and if the rules and tools made available by ACDEP for the platform under the Proli-FaNS project are

well followed. I noted from her presentation and from the answers to my various questions that considerable effort is being made to follow the reporting templates and guidelines of the Proli-FaNS project. However, the partners highlighted some difficulties related to the delay in transferring funds, which delays the implementation of some activities and induces the platform in an infernal circle of delay in implementing activities, reporting and calling for funds. Other ACDEP-related financial situations were presented to me and I promised to help the Cameroon CP to solve these problems so that they do not impede Proli-FaNS activities and achievements in Cameroon.

Amina, who is in charge of the Proli-FaNS M&E within the PROLINNOVA–Cameroon technical team, explained to me her M&E work, the level of compliance with the guidelines and M&E tools proposed by ACDEP and the difficulties encountered. It appears from Amina that M&E tools do not pose major difficulties to be used. However, she stressed that further explanations are sometimes needed to collect the most relevant information sought by ACDEP to feed the various interim reports and to verify the degree of achievement of the project objectives.



Photo 1: SRC with the technical team members of PROLINNOVA–Cameroon

3.3. Thursday 7 December 2017

This day was dedicated to field visits. Three innovations and their innovative farmers were visited on the outskirts of Yaoundé. The objective was to better understand the content of these innovations through questions to the innovators themselves, and to understand the reasons why they are chosen by the leaders of PROLINNOVA–Cameroon in the course of the implementation of the Proli-FaNS project. The innovations visited were:

3.3.1. Innovation 1: *The production of bee colonies*

Serge Ayangma uses inexpensive endogenous methods to increase the number of bee colonies available in his beekeeping station, in order to offer new beekeepers the opportunity to access highly honey-producing bee queens (Photo 2 & Photo 3). This innovation aims to increase the local production of honey, while taking advantage of the growing demand of new beekeepers for equipment and bee colonies to start new beekeeping farms.



Photo 2: Serge's bee colony multiplication station



Photo 3: Serge explaining his innovation

3.3.2. Innovation 2: Production of poultry feed with local ingredients

Joseph Martial Ambomo produces poultry feeds from locally available ingredients such as aloe leaves (*Aloe vera*), moringa leaves (*Moringa oleifera*), cattle blood and local fish meal (Photo 4 & Photo 5). These poultry feeds produced without using industrial concentrates imported from Europe do not adversely affect the quality of the chickens fed with them, which would be highly appreciated by the customers.



Photo 4: Joseph's assistant explaining his master's innovation



Photo 5: Joseph's assistant in his master's poultry feed mill

3.3.3. Innovation 3: Production of maize beer with a local vegetable starter

Véronique Eyenga Nkoah uses the bark of the local plant called *Ebap* (*Santiria trimera*) to induce fermentation in the process of making traditional maize-based beer (Photo 6 & Photo 7). This activity is perceived as being a significant source of income that contributes to the survival of this single mother's household.



Photo 6: Véronique explaining her innovation



Photo 7: Véronique showing how ingredients are measured unspecified with local tools

3.4. Friday 8 December 2017

A debriefing session on the field visits was held at the headquarters of COSADER in Yaoundé with the leading trio of PROLINNOVA–Cameroon. The discussions focused on three key points: (i) the nature of the innovations selected for PID, (ii) the arrangements made for the implementation of PID experiments, and (iii) the M&E and documentation.

3.4.1. *Nature of the innovations selected for PID*

The local innovations selected and validated to be the subject of PID by the Cameroon platform were generally presented as “finite” innovations, whose promoters expect only external financing like that of Proli-FaNS to scale them up, in order to improve their income. For example, the innovative beekeeper does not envision any improvement in his innovation, but instead needs money to buy equipment to design new hives and to increase the number of bee colonies, the demand for which is growing in various regions of Cameroon. Associating extension services, researchers or other farmers to improve this innovation did not seem relevant to him, since he seems to master this innovation much more than anyone coming from outside. He is the one who trains the outside actors who often come to him, like the universities and agricultural training centres, whose seasonal trainees come to learn at his side. This innovation, as it was presented to me, did not offer great prospects in terms of joint experimentation and PID, unless deeper exchanges are held with the innovative farmer to identify how he can collaborate with others to improve what he is already doing.

The second innovation, which is the production of poultry feeds with local ingredients without the addition of imported concentrates, is still at a nascent stage. According to the assistant of the innovator, it has not yet been applied on a certain scale with results that can convince others of its relevance to help local poultry farmers in their husbandry practices. In addition, the costs associated with implementing this innovation are a bit high. The innovator himself was absent during our visit, but the explanations we received from his assistant made me doubt the relevance of including this innovation among those planned to be subjected to joint experimentation.

The third innovation, which is the production of maize beer without chemical starter, beyond the debate it raised within the wider PROLINNOVA network on the ethical considerations related to the promotion of alcohol consumption, also did not convince me as a subject of joint experimentation. It seems to be a centuries-old practice that the innovator inherited from her grandparents and has been applying for years without adding new things. While it has been innovative to apply a well-known practice in palm-wine production to maize beer production, which is also highly developed in the region, some parameters were missing for this innovation to truly contribute to food and nutrition security. Even if it generates some resources, the production of maize beer is not economically profitable for the innovator, who plans to leave it for the benefit of cropping, from which she derives

more income to cover the expenses of her household. The main objective of the promoter is not currently to start any PID, but to benefit if possible from support for the acquisition of heavier and more expensive equipment for processing (maize sheller and threshing machine), storage (cool chamber) and packaging (bottle or other modern packaging solution). In this context, the highly budget-demanding objective of the innovator does not fall within the scope of small-scale experimentation within Proli-FaNS, unless further discussions with her allow the CP leaders to target a research question that can be pursued with the resources available for PROLINNOVA–Cameroon.

3.4.2. Preparation for PID

The success of joint experiments will depend on the preparation by the local actors. Some weaknesses were noted in the PID scheme envisaged by the Cameroon platform:

Research question not yet clarified at the moment of the visit: The research questions for the implementation of PID still remain to be clarified at the time of my visit to Cameroon. Most innovators, according to their own explanations, just need financial support to strengthen their activities, but are not curious to see how they can combine various local ingredients in partnership with other actors to achieve better results that can improve their innovations. This does not mean that there would be no research question if we understood these innovations better, but this will depend on the willingness of innovators to pursue such questions with the Proli-FaNS support. Some key research questions were identified and shared with the Cameroon CP partners to enable them to have a clearer idea of the objectives of each joint experiment to implement. I encouraged them to continue the exchange with the innovative farmers in order to retain what is relevant to farmer-led research through PID.

Ambitions of innovators beyond available resources: The needs expressed by most innovators during my mission were not those needed for the implementation of PID. They all seek financing to increase their level of production and boost their income, which means that the small funds available within Proli-FaNS remain insufficient. Beyond the fact that resources are insufficient, as noted by most innovators as well as those responsible for the CP, I encouraged the leaders of PROLINNOVA–Cameroon to ensure that setting up funds will allow local actors to be part of a dynamic of joint experimentation by agreeing to collaborate with other actors who could contribute to the improvement of their innovations.

Local partnership for joint experimentation not clear: The PID being prepared in Cameroon does not allow to see clearly – around each targeted innovation – the partners associated or to be associated for implementing genuine joint experimentation. Apart from a single innovation for which the platform leaders plan to involve students from agricultural training schools in the country, a dynamic of collaboration or cooperation is still to be improved between farmers, researchers, academics, extension

officers, independent experts and other stakeholders in the initiatives to prepare for PID. PID had not started in Cameroon at the time of my mission, but I felt they would not be successful, in any case as real PID, if the preparation is not better done. These are some weaknesses that I noted and shared with the Cameroon partners for better preparation and success of their PID.

I invited PROLINNOVA–Cameroon leaders to review and analyse more objectively the innovations that will actually be the subject of PID. I also recommended that some innovations be replaced if possible by others, in case the partners do not agree on the research questions and the objectives of the joint experiment or in case the innovators do not agree to involve other partners in improving their innovations. The list of innovations available in the newly published catalogue should facilitate this process so that the research issue is more clearly posed and a true partnership between innovators and other actors is agreed on for the success of the PID. This gave way to rich discussions with the partners who gave me convincing explanations on most of my concerns, and I encouraged them to do everything in their power to ensure that the Proli-FaNS project can achieve its goals. We agreed to have regular online exchanges to dispel concerns and backstop the project implementers.

3.4.3. M&E and documentation

The Cameroon platform did not have major difficulties in M&E of Proli-FaNS activities. However, I talked with the person responsible for M&E within the PROLINNOVA–Cameroon technical team about the minor problems she encounters (or that she might encounter) in filling in the M&E tools proposed by ACDEP as part of the Proli-FaNS project. I gave Amina some advice, while expressing my readiness to respond to her requests for the accomplishment of her task and for the achievement of the project's objectives. She promised to come back to me in case she encounters difficulties.

In terms of documentation, PROLINNOVA–Cameroon partners produced and shared with me copies of a catalogue of innovations identified and validated as part of the Proli-FaNS project. This shows the considerable efforts made to ensure wide dissemination of innovations at the national level. I encouraged them on this point and also gave them advice on how to properly document future PID activities. We all agreed to join our efforts to achieve in the near future a catalogue of farmer innovations at the subregional level.

3.4.4. Other visits and achievements

After the closing session with the leaders of PROLINNOVA–Cameroon, I visited two other partners who are CP members, including ODECO NGO (Organization for Development, Study and Advisory Services), which is a Cameroonian organisation very involved in environment protection, farmer innovation promotion and agricultural product marketing. With Sylvie Mbog, member of the NSC of

PROLINNOVA–Cameroon and her collaborators, we discussed the strengthening of the support to the farmers for the development of their innovations, which could contribute significantly to the achievement of food and nutrition security. Innovations in the fields of processing, storing, packaging and transporting agricultural commodities have been more widely discussed with partners who called for subregional initiatives to promote PID in those sectors. The role of women in innovation processes and policy dialogue at the subregional level was also discussed in a fruitful way, as well as dissemination and upscaling initiatives targeting innovations improved through PID.

I also had a few minutes of exchange with Gertrude Ngo Bahoya, another member of PROLINNOVA–Cameroon, in a hotel in Yaoundé where she was participating in a workshop on “farmer seeds and seed technologies”. With Gertrude, also a member of the NSC of PROLINNOVA–Cameroon, we discussed the promotion of innovations related to the preservation of farmer seeds for food and nutrition security. We agreed to continue exchanges later, in order to initiate at the subregional level proposals on farmer seeds and endogenous seed systems. I noted a great enthusiasm of the Cameroon partners to play their part so that the regionalisation of PROLINNOVA is a success in the West and Central Africa subregion.

3.5. Saturday 9 December 2017

This was the day of my return trip from Yaoundé (Cameroon) to Cotonou (Benin).

4. Relevance of the visit and main results achieved

My contact with the Cameroon platform, and the exchanges held during this visit have been beneficial both for myself and for the platform.

This visit to Cameroon allowed me to understand that the CP in this country has come a long way since the last mission of Djibril and Joe, which allowed them to solve a number of problems. The partners confirmed that they have followed the recommendations of this mission, which has enabled them to have today all governance bodies that are learning to function well. Commendable efforts have been made to respect the principles of PROLINNOVA, promote and disseminate local innovation, and promote policy dialogue. I took this opportunity to express my readiness to support the leaders of the Cameroon platform, who need to be encouraged and supported in their efforts to learn and experiment with PROLINNOVA approaches. As part of the promotion of South–South backstopping, it is important to call on the expertise available in the West and Central Africa subregion to support this young platform, which needs special attention to reach the level of other, more experienced CPs.

For the officials of the technical team of the Cameroon platform, this visit allowed them to feel a full member of the PROLINNOVA network and to renew their commitment to do everything possible to ensure that the objectives of the Proli-FaNS project are achieved and that the platform continues to meet the minimum commitments and requirements that will enable it to maintain its status as an active platform within the subregional network. The partners also perceived the relevance of this visit for the success of the PID activities that are envisaged. This is what they expressed through the final speech reported below:

“The Proli-FaNS missions in Cameroon are always timely. They always come when we need them. Djibril and Joe came here at a critical time when we needed help to solve a number of problems. Now, you too have arrived here at a moment of transition from the stage of identification and validation of innovations to the initiation and implementation of PID. You came at the right time. The discussions we had and the different explanations you gave us are very enlightening and will certainly help us to succeed in our PID. Visits of this kind in the future will be useful and we will be very pleased. They will allow us to advance in PROLINNOVA to reach the level of other country platforms that already have much more experience in the network than us” Technical team members, PROLINNOVA–Cameroon, Yaoundé, 08/12/2017

5. Conclusion

The general impression that emerges from my visit to Cameroon is that this platform is not as experienced as those of Burkina Faso, Senegal and Mali that I visited a little earlier in 2017. The partners are making efforts that must be recognised and welcomed, but special attention must be given to them to help them conduct the Proli-FaNS project well and develop their platform. The coordination of Proli-FaNS within ACDEP, as well as the subregional coordination of PROLINNOVA in West and Central Africa, must remain attentive and respond to their various requests. As a result, our partners in Cameroon will also be in a position to fully play their part in achieving the regionalisation objectives of the PROLINNOVA network in the West and Central Africa subregion.

