

Promoting African women's innovation for food and nutrition security

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Woman innovator improves traditional dish - Alice Atanga, a farmer without formal education living in Feo in Bongo District, northern Ghana, improved the traditional steamed pudding (tubani) by combining cowpea and soybean with Bambara beans and maize, plus some baagna (*Piliostigma reticulatum*) leaves, to make the dish more nutritious. She collaborated with nutrition advisors to experiment with using flour from millet instead of maize, which does not grow so well under drier conditions. She has encouraged others in the Feo Women's Group to make their own adaptations to the traditional tubani.

Credit: Margaret Ama Kyiu

A new project to promote farmer innovation was launched in Accra, Ghana, in late February 2023. The Catholic Church organisation Misereor has supported this work for several years through a grant from the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. It recently approved the 3-year follow-on project "Expanding the promotion of local innovation for food security and healthy nutrition to strengthen resilience" (ELI-FaNS) under the umbrella of the Prolinnova network. This is an international community of practice that promotes local innovation and farmer-led participatory development in agroecology and natural resource management.

ELI-FaNS seeks to improve the nutrition, health, and livelihoods of rural communities by integrating farmer-led participatory approaches into governmental organisations mandated to support small-scale farmers. Such approaches strengthen rural communities' capacities to innovate and thus be more resilient to change – able to adapt continuously to new challenges and opportunities.

The earlier Misereor-funded work of Prolinnova in sub-Saharan Africa focused on helping small-scale farmers (especially women and women's group) improve nutrition security in their households and communities. Locally appropriate innovations in food

production, processing and marketing were co-created by women and other actors in agricultural research and development. Women became more widely recognised as innovators and were supported in further developing their innovations, which are low-cost, use locally available resources and build on traditional crops and dishes. Women's innovation has also enriched family meals.

Farmer-led

ELI-FaNS now focuses on encouraging and enabling researchers and university lecturers to apply farmer-led approaches in their own work. Policymakers in agricultural research and education are being made more aware of the livelihood benefits of farmer-led approaches.

Most project activities are carried out by multistakeholder platforms in Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa. The platform in Benin – the most recent addition to the Prolinnova network – is being mentored by people in the other, more experienced platforms.

The project also supports mutual learning and policy advocacy by all 13 country platforms in Africa through two subregional platforms – in West & Central Africa and Eastern & Southern Africa – facilitated by Subregional Coordinators Paul Jimmy (Benin) and Jacob Wanyama (Kenya), who also help the platforms improve their governance and networking.

ACDEP (Association of Church-based Development Projects) in Tamale, northern Ghana, coordinates this multi-country project on behalf of the Prolinnova network. In each country, a National Steering Committee comprising people from farmer organisations, research, academia, advisory services and – in some cases – private companies provides overall guidance to the platform's activities and formulates strategies and plans to realise the platform's objectives.

For more information about the ELI-FaNS project, see <https://prolinnova.net/category/main-themes/food-nutri-sec/>