

Brief report on participation in the International Colloquium of Benin's National University of Agriculture (UNA) on "Agroecology and Sustainable Development in Africa" in November 2024

by Paul Jimmy, Prolinnova Subregional Coordinator in West and Central Africa

On 26–29 November 2024, the 2nd International Scientific Colloquium of Benin's National University of Agriculture (UNA) was held on the Sakété campus. The theme of the Colloquium was "Agroecology and sustainable development in Africa".

The opening ceremony began with official speeches by Élie Montchowui (Chair of the Organising Committee), Pascal Olounladé (Vice-Rector in charge of Research) and Agossou Bruno Djossa (Rector of the UNA). They focused on the importance of agroecological initiatives for agricultural transformation and the opportunity of this event to place the UNA at the heart of research and of regional and international cooperation, as well as showing the commitment to respond to the current challenges in our societies. Armèle Ahlinvi Gayet (representative of the Ministry of Higher Education) officially launched the conference.

Following these speeches, two keynote presentations were made. The first was by Djibril Thiam, Director of the Senegalese NGO AgriBio Services and National Coordinator of the Prolinnova–Senegal Country Platform (CP). He highlighted the concept of agroecology, its principles and its challenges in the Sahel and then presented the Prolinnova network, its approach to local innovation and farmer-led research, its focus on agroecology and some examples of local innovation in agroecology that came out of projects carried out by network members in CPs in Africa. He concluded by highlighting the future prospects for farmer-led joint research in agroecology, together with other actors in agricultural research and development, and called for institutionalisation of this Participatory Innovation Development (PID) approach as the key to sustainable development. He took the opportunity to inform and invite participants to visit the Prolinnova stand, which was presented by Paul Jimmy (Prolinnova Subregional Coordinator for West and Central Africa). Djibril's speech was welcomed by the presidium set up for moderating the inaugural communications and by the audience as well with a hearty round of applause.

The Prolinnova stand displayed numerous flyers, catalogues of local innovations, policy briefs and PID reports from various CPs. Paul Jimmy had the opportunity to interact with several visitors to the stand who had been motivated by Djibril's inaugural communication. These included the UNA Rector and the Vice-Rector in charge of Research (see Photo 1), as well as students and researchers, who were given further information about the Prolinnova network and some of the resources on the table that were available for distribution. The participants were impressed by the international coverage of the network, given the number of documents such as catalogues coming from different countries.

The final day was marked by the final communications, which brought the discussion sessions to a close, the awarding of prizes to the best scientific papers and posters, and the closing speeches.

The symposium was a major scientific event for exchange, learning and networking, bringing together experts, researchers, development organisations, students and political decision-makers from 18 countries for a total of 181 scientific papers and around 20 stands showcasing innovations in various areas of agroecology. Prolinnova's participation caught the attention of many: several participants as well as the organisers labelled me as "Prolinnova's Man" during the conference.



Photos: Rector of UNA and students visit the Prolinnova stand

