



Prolinnova Uganda at the 15th Annual Indigenous and Traditional Food and Seed Fair, organized by PELUM Uganda.

Background

Prolinnova is one of several networks whose secretariat is hosted by Environmental Alert (EA) in Uganda. Prolinnova is an NGO-initiated global community of practice that promotes local innovation processes in agroecology and natural resource management.

Having recently secured USD 50K in funding from the Agroecology Fund/Global Green Grants Fund/East Africa Regional Fund (EARF), Prolinnova Uganda, in partnership with Prolinnova Kenya, has embarked on an 18-month project.

15th Annual Indigenous and Traditional Seed and Food Festival

Funds from the EARF project were utilized to facilitate three farmer innovators identified by Kulika Uganda, an implementing partner of the project, to participate in the 15th Indigenous Food and Traditional Seed and Food Festival/Fair – an annual event organised by PELUM Uganda. The festival took place on 30th to 31st October 2025 at the People’s Space, hosted by Hotel Africana, under the theme: ***“Exploring Uganda’s Indigenous Food and Cultural Diversity.”*** PELUM also hosted the 7th National Agroecology Actors Symposium on 28th October 2025 with the theme: ***“Accelerating Agroecology Transitions for Sustainability: Reshaping Policy, Markets, Finance, and Practice for Transformative Change.”***

The two-day Indigenous and traditional seed and food festival brought together diverse stakeholders to celebrate, share, and promote Uganda’s Indigenous food systems and cultural heritage. It featured:

- Exhibitions of Indigenous and traditional foods and seeds.
- Cultural items including live music, traditional dances, cooking demonstrations, and food tasting experiences.
- Side events, including:
 - Unlocking the potential of neglected and under-utilised species (NUS) for food security, nutrition, and climate resilience
 - Farmer-led innovation clinic- promoting and scaling up farmer-led innovations in agriculture and food systems.

Environmental Alert (EA) was invited, as the host of Prolinnova Uganda, to make a keynote address during the farmer-led innovation side event titled: “Empowering Farmers to Scale up Innovations for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems”, and with the theme: “From field to Future: Farmers driving innovations in food systems”.

Side Event on Farmer-led Innovation.

The side event was organised and facilitated by members of Prolinnova Uganda from EA and PELUM Uganda. Students, farmers, and farmer innovators participated in the event.

The Executive Director (ED) of EA delivered the keynote address at the side event. He focused on Prolinnova's Farmer-led innovation development approach, initiated more than 25 years ago and now used by many agricultural development stakeholders worldwide, including in Uganda. She spoke briefly about Prolinnova and its vision and recognised that investing in farmer-led innovation is key to building sustainable, inclusive, and climate-resilient food systems. She defined key words such as farmer innovation; Indigenous knowledge; food systems and their key components; local innovation; local innovation(s); and farmer innovators. She discussed the reasons why it is necessary to give attention to farmer innovation.

The ED further reaffirmed to participants that the “power of farmer-led innovation in transforming food systems” is about shifting from top-down agricultural models and thinking towards bottom-up, locally driven solutions that make food systems more **sustainable, inclusive, and climate-resilient**. She said that it is about appreciating that:

- farmers, not just as beneficiaries and mere passive recipients, but as innovators and co-creators of knowledge.
- Farmer-led innovation makes food systems more adaptive and resilient to challenges such as climate change, market volatility, and resource pressures, all of which demand flexibility, and farmer-led approaches allow local adaptation.
- Collaboration between farmers, scientists and policy makers multiplies impact, in the sense that farmer-led innovation thrives when supported by participatory innovation development (PID), also referred to as farmer-led joint experimentation.
- empowering farmers, especially women and youth, helps unlock potential, because women and youth farmers are often most innovative and yet the least supported (e.g., with information, finance, access to markets, value addition, etc.).
- Scaling farmer-led innovation requires the right environment, in terms of policies, funding, etc., and extension systems need to shift from *teaching to facilitating learning and experimentation*. This also calls for government and donors to invest in farmer innovation funds, innovation hubs, and peer-to-peer learning networks.

EA concluded the key note address by reiterating that: i) supporting farmer-led innovation aligns with **climate-smart agriculture, nutrition-sensitive food systems, and SDGs**; and that success will depend on **valuing farmers' knowledge and social learning**; and that ii) the transformation we need is bottom-up; it is not just about changing *what* farmers grow, but *how* we value their knowledge, creativity and agency. The ED's final message was that “If we want to transform food systems in Uganda and the East African region, we must start by transforming the way we see or view farmers – not as the last link in the chain, but as the *first innovators* in the system”.

To highlight farmer-led innovation, a competition was held in which innovators presented their ideas to the audience at the side event. The presentations were then evaluated by a panel of judges who used a set of criteria to award scores. The three highest-scoring innovators were selected for awards and included one of the three innovators supported by the EARF project.