

Nepalese Farmer Innovation Fair draws national and international visitors

A Nepalese Farmer Innovation Fair was organised on 2-4 May 2009 by ProInnova Nepal, with LI-BIRD (Local Initiatives for Biodiversity Research and Development) taking the lead, supported by partners in the National Working Group - Ecoscenter (Chitwan), Practical Action Nepal (Kathmandu), Institute for Agriculture and Animal Sciences (Rampur), Tuki Sunkoshi (Sindupulchowk) and the Department of Agriculture (Mustang).

The fair celebrated the creativity of Nepalese farmer innovators and gave them recognition, calling attention to the importance of farmer innovation in agricultural development through a public event, bringing policymakers in contact with local innovators and creating an opportunity for the IAPS (Innovation Asia-Pacific Symposium) participants to meet and engage with the innovators.

The farmer innovators came from all corners of Nepal. They were selected through ProInnova Nepal's network of partners as well as announcements through newspapers and television. The selected farmer innovators were supported financially for their travel and stay in Kathmandu. A press conference held before the fair publicised the event widely and attracted the attention of key stakeholders in agriculture research and development – from the National Agricultural Research Council, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, international and national NGOs.

The fair was set up in the spacious grounds of the City Hall in Kathmandu. It involved about 60 male and female innovators, who each had their own booth in which they displayed their innovations using models, pictures, photos etc. Students from two universities served as translators to help the innovators in sharing their experiences with non-Nepalese visitors. These students met with the innovators before the fair to become acquainted with their innovations. This was an excellent way to facilitate communication with non-Nepalese visitors as well as to introduce Nepalese students to local innovation.

The fair was formally opened by the Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives on the morning of 2 May at a short inaugural session in the City Hall. Invitees to the session included the Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Director General of the Department of Agriculture (DoA), several key individuals from the DoA and other related ministries, NGOs and donor agencies. After the formal opening, the Minister and the invitees spent nearly two hours visiting the different booths at the fair and talking to the farmer innovators. The opening received considerable media coverage including a live television broadcast through Kanthipur TV.

After the inaugural session, the fair was open to the public. Despite political unrest in Kathmandu, the fair attracted more than 15,000 visitors from within and beyond Kathmandu, including numerous schoolchildren. The last day of the fair on 4 May was planned to coincide with the first day of the IAPS. After the inauguration of the IAPS, all symposium participants were brought by bus to the innovation fair, where they spent the afternoon meeting with the farmer innovators, who were eager and enthusiastic to share their experiences. With plenty of students as translators, the participants were able to have lively and engaging discussions with the farmer innovators, which provided much positive energy to discuss issues around local innovation and innovation systems during the symposium.

A highlight of the fair was the giving of awards to two outstanding innovators – a man and a woman – who had been selected through a three-person selection committee set up by the fair organisers. The awards were handed over by the Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives. In addition, all farmer innovators who took part in the fair were recognised for their contributions and awarded certificates of merit. The two farmers who won the top prizes gave speeches during the opening of the IAPS.