

History of the creation of Prolinnova–Benin



Georges Djohy, August 2021

The Prolinnova international network has a long history of collaboration in Benin with several researchers, academics and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on local innovation issues. One example was in the framework of the EU-funded JOint Learning in Innovation Systems in African Agriculture (JOLISAA) project (2012–16). This collaboration provided opportunities for discussions between Prolinnova members and local partners about the possibility of forming a Prolinnova Country Platform (CP) to promote local innovation and farmer-led joint experimentation in the country. Over the years, some highly committed young people made several initiatives to set up a multi-actor platform to federate individual efforts to promote farmer innovation. However, their enthusiasm was cooled down by the difficulties they encountered in mobilising the various actors, and they could not achieve their goal.

One example is the initiative in 2016 of the Action Center for Food Security and Sustainable Development (CASAD), an NGO led by Ambaliou Olounlade, who requested that a platform created in southern Benin be recognised as a Prolinnova CP. Ms Genevieve Audet-Belanger from the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) in the Netherlands, the international secretariat of the Prolinnova network at the time, visited Cotonou and commended the efforts made by CASAD to bring together a dozen actors, but also noted some shortcomings to meet the minimum requirements for a local multistakeholder network to be accepted as a Prolinnova CP. Unfortunately, CASAD did not pursue these efforts. Several other Beninois experts and organisations with good experience made similar attempts but did not manage to meet the minimum requirements. The support and frequent reminders by Georges Djohy from Benin when he was subregional coordinator of Prolinnova for West and Central Africa did not change the situation.

Despite the non-existence of a CP in Benin, several people in Benin did, however, become part of Prolinnova's virtual network – a Googlegroups mailing list through which information and opportunities related to local innovation (LI) and participatory innovation development (PID) are regularly disseminated to this wide group of actors sharing Prolinnova's vision.

Only recently was success achieved in setting up a CP in Benin. The process started in 2019, when a partnership was formed between the University of Parakou (UP) in northern Benin, the Prolinnova international network, KIT and the NGO AgriBio Services (Senegal) in the project *“Capacity building of agricultural college teachers to support social entrepreneurship based on local innovation for food and nutritional security”*. This project, funded by Nuffic (Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education) through its Orange Knowledge Programme – Tailor-Made Training Plus (OKP/TMT+), provided training geared toward valuing farmer creativity in local innovation to improve the success of State efforts to promote local agricultural entrepreneurship to increase food security.

Within the framework of this project, 18 staff members selected from two agricultural technical colleges (Kika and Ina) in northern Benin and from various faculties of the UP were trained in 2020 and 2021 in various aspects of LI and PID, with a view to strengthening their capacities to promote

such processes. Virtual sessions with international experts were complemented by practical assignments, during which the trainees interacted with each other and with other local actors, including men and women farmer innovators. Local experts mentored the work on the ground. These activities became excellent fora for sharing and pooling ideas on how to further integrate indigenous knowledge, local creativity and PID into agricultural research and development in Benin.

The project team contacted several people and organisations in the country to identify others interested in the approach. This led to the organisation of a meeting on 15 May 2021 in Parakou to set up a multi-actor platform to promote local innovation and farmer-led joint research and development. About 30 organisations came together to form the network, facilitated and coordinated by project staff in UP. These organisations include:

1. farmer organisations: *Association des Maraîchers de Parakou* (Association of Market Gardeners of Parakou), *Union Communale des Producteurs de Parakou* (Parakou Municipal Union of Producers), *Association pour la Promotion de l'Élevage au Sahel et en Savane* (Association for Promoting Livestock Husbandry in the Sahel and Savanna) (*APESS–Benin*);
2. institutions of higher education and formal research, notably the schools, faculties and laboratories of UP;
3. Agricultural technical colleges: *Lycée Technique Agricole d'Ina* and *Lycée Technique Agricole de Kika*;
4. Agricultural extension/advisory agencies: *Agence Territoriale de Développement Agricole (ATDA, pole 4)*, *Cellule communale ATDA4-Parakou* (Parakou Communal Unit of the Territorial Agency for Agricultural Development of Benin's Agricultural Development Pole 4);
5. NGOs: Esperance Vie, BReDA, INUDE, SIA N'SON, APEM, CARITAS Parakou, APIC, APIDEV, Weltaare, ADDAF, DERANA, DEDRAS, Better Life, BCD, GERED, ACDD, EDAPAD and BUPDOS;
6. the Benin Platform for Food Security (PBSA).

The multistakeholder platform, initially called INNOVA-Benin, was set up with the financial support of Nuffic through the OKP/TMT+ project. It drew up and agreed on a charter and an action plan for the coming year. On 20 June 2021, the platform applied for membership and official recognition as a CP in the Prolinnova international Community of Practice. In July 2021, the Prolinnova Oversight Group (POG) reviewed and greatly appreciated the application, and it accepted the group as a CP. The INNOVA-Benin platform then became Prolinnova–Benin.

Prolinnova–Benin aims to:

1. identify and promote local innovation in the various agro-sylvo-pastoral subsectors in Benin;
2. promote joint experimentation by farmers (crop farmers, livestock keepers, fish farmers, beekeepers, forest users etc.) to improve and scale up local innovations;
3. provide training and other forms of capacity building for various actors at local, national, subregional and international level on promoting LI and PID;
4. promote policy dialogue to institutionalise the LI/PID approach within agricultural research, training/education and support/advisory structures;
5. participate in and contribute to efforts of other entities (platforms, individuals etc.) sharing the same values and principles at local, national, subregional and international level;
6. mobilise the necessary resources for continuing activities, scaling up of successes and sustaining achievements;
7. produce and disseminate documents on LI/PID processes.

Prolinnova–Benin is managed by a Steering Committee (decision-making body) and a Coordination Team (implementation body), whose composition is shown below:

Prolinnova–Benin Steering Committee (SC)

1. Hermann Biauou, Kika Agricultural Technical College
2. Honorat Edja, UP – **SC Chairperson**
3. Ismail Moumouni LRIDA Lab, UP
4. (Ms) Janina Loisel, Better Life NGO
5. Jean Kpetere, DEDRAS NGO
6. Ouorou Ganni Ouorou Boun, Ina Agricultural Technical College
7. (Ms) Philomène Biao Yabi, CC Pkou/ATDA4
8. Souleymane Issifou, Parakou Municipal Union of Producers
9. Yacoubou Boni, APIDEV NGO

Georges Djohy, UP, CP coordinator – *ex officio* member

Prolinnova–Benin Coordination Team (CT)

1. (Ms) Aline Aloukoutou, BreDA NGO – Partnership & Policy Dialogue
2. Djibril Mohamadou, Parakou Association of Market Gardners – Logistics
3. (Ms) Djoudé Issa Demo, Weltaare NGO – Treasurer
4. Georges Djohy, UP – **Coordinator**
5. Léonard Adje, Esperance Vie NGO – Secretary

The platform is open to any agricultural research, advisory or development organisation – including farmer- and community-led organisations – wishing to promote farmer innovation and creativity for food and nutrition security, sustainable natural resource management, community resilience to global changes, women’s empowerment and sustainable development, regardless of its location and scope of action in Benin.

For information, membership and partnership, contact:

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