

# First innovation fair celebrates farmer ingenuity in Cameroon

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The multi-actor platform for promoting local innovation in ecological agriculture in Cameroon (Prolinnova–Cameroon) organised the very first farmer innovation fair in Cameroon on 27–29 May 2021. The event aimed to: 1) recognise and value the innovativeness of farmers in the 10 regions of the country, and 2) create an opportunity for farmers to network with other farmers, public-sector researchers and agricultural advisors, and other public and private actors.

Over 1500 people visited the fair stands over the three days. The event showcased local innovations from the five agro-ecological zones in Cameroon – single-wet-season rainforest, double-wet-season rainforest, highlands, high savannah and Sahel – with each zone having its

own challenges and opportunities.

Prior to the event, the Prolinnova–Cameroon coordinator set up a jury with people from government institutions representing agricultural research, advisory services and education, and from NGOs. The jury, led by Constant Amougou from the Institute of Agricultural Research for Development (IRAD), selected innovations by 50 farmers, including 21 women. Selections were made according to criteria of local relevance, applicability to other farmers, use of local materials and sustainability.

## Great opportunity

Christine Andela, Director of COSADER (Collective of NGOs for Food Security and Rural Development in Cameroon), the host organisation of Prolinnova–Cameroon, stated In her

welcoming speech that the event was a great opportunity to ‘celebrate farmers’ ingenuity in Cameroon’.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development gave 14 financial awards to farmers who had developed innovations in different categories such as food processing, vegetable production, animal health and forestry. These included special awards for innovations developed by women and by young people, as well as the top innovations in each region.

Award-winning innovations included: ‘Heaven Juice’, used to conserve fruit without chemical preservatives; crop protection using pest- and insect-repelling plants; ‘foolewooh’, an adaptive and open-source (royalty-free) tomato variety; and producing maggots to make feed for poultry and fish.

The fair was not only an event to showcase 50 farmer innovations, however. The Ministry of Research and Scientific Innovations also presented some of its joint work with farmers in implementing the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development

## Automatic eru leaf chopper

Bright Teboh Ndika, aged 26, developed an electric machine for chopping the leaves of eru, a local name for the vine called African jointfir in English (*Gnetum africana*). The leaves are used as a vegetable and, like other leafy vegetables such as amaranth, are chopped before cooking. On Cameroon markets, women are often seen chopping eru manually with knives. Eru is a non-timber forest product that is collected in the wild but, for over a decade, has been domesticated and people are planting it. Eru leaves are exported even to Nigeria. Bright received a prize at the fair for his innovation - by a young person - in food processing.



Bright Teboh Ndika.

Credit: Felix Ndube

Programme (CAADP).

The Cameroon Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (CAMFASS) also presented its work on agroecology, biodiversity conservation and urban farming, in some cases with physically handicapped people.

In addition, panel discussions were held, based on the local innovations. Researchers, development workers and university teachers could thus share experiences with farmer innovators, enabling all to learn from each other.

The main topics of these discussions were agroecology and innovative integrated systems, innovative agricultural and agri-food technologies in rural areas, farmers' knowledge and introduced technologies, and partnerships and agricultural innovations. Each panel offered an opportunity for farmer innovators to express their specific concerns and to give their ideas on how to address certain issues. This included debating, for example, how to document local recipes so as to give value to local products for food and nutrition security. How to hold events like this more often, was also debated.

### Sharing knowledge

The participative approach taken in the panels stimulated lively interaction between farmers and visitors from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER), the Ministry of Women's Economic Empowerment (MINPROF), CAMFASS, Yaoundé 1 University, IRAD, CIRAD (Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement, France), CVUC (Communes et Villes Unies du Cameroon) and the Cameroon bureau of FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations).

This first farmer innovation fair revealed the diversity of innovations developed by farmers in all 10 regions of Cameroon. It also opened up good perspectives for expanding the Prolinnova platform in Cameroon. For example, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development asked the Coordinator of the National Programme for Monitoring and Strengthening Food Security (PNVRS) to become the

## Heaven Juice

Jeannette Arielle Melissa Mbem Mbo, aged 28, processes local fruits such as papaya, pineapple and soursop into juice without using chemical preservatives. She washes and chops the fruit, extracts the juice by straining it through mousseline fabric and then packages the juice for the market in recycled glass bottles which are sterilised in boiling water. Her main source of income is now making and selling fruit juice. She received a prize at the fair for fruit processing.



Jeannette Arielle Melissa Mbem Mbo.

*Credit: Leopold Ejimbi*

focal point of MINADER in the Prolinnova–Cameroon multi-stakeholder platform and to give attention to issues related to farmer innovation.

Another new perspective is the possibility of collaboration between COSADER, as host organisation for Prolinnova–Cameroon, and the FAO bureau in the country, MINPROF and

other partners that are keen to promote farmer-initiated innovation and PID (Participatory Innovation Development) approaches. The COSADER Director called for strong support from public authorities, as well as a closer collaboration with researchers, agricultural advisors and any other partners willing to support these approaches.