

West African Fair shows off farmer innovations

Around 50 farmer innovators from eight West African countries showcased their innovations at the two-day West African Farmer Innovation Fair (FIPAO) (Foire de l'Innovation Paysanne en l'Afrique de l'Ouest) held in May 2015 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. A report by Ingrid Flink and Gabriela Quiroga.

The fair put the spotlight on farmers' creativity and their roles in agricultural innovation and participatory research. It was preceded by a three-day workshop on approaches to farmer-led research in West Africa.

The two events were hosted by INADES Formation and Réseau MARP in Burkina Faso and co-organised by the ProInnova (PROmoting Local INNOVation) International Secretariat in collaboration with seven other organisations (see below).

All of them have a keen interest to encourage and intensify linkages and learning among all actors involved in agricultural research and development related to smallholder family farming. FIPAO followed the example of the East African Farmer Innovation Fair held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2013 (see AT Sept. 2013) and the national farmer innovation fair held in Kathmandu, Nepal, in 2009.

At this major event of intense exchanges, the sharing of common challenges and ideas from elsewhere,



Curious visitors at the Ghanaian farmer innovator stand at the recent West African Farmer Innovation Fair.

Credit Gabriela Quiroga

could change a person's life. Farmers came to share their innovations and also learn from their fellow peers in West Africa.

"FIPAO proves to revive meetings and exchanges of experience among innovative farmers and encourages female farmers like myself to invest

more in local innovation,” said Yombo Naomi, a farmer from Benin.

For Joseph Abarike, a farmer from Ghana, FIPAO has even provided a platform for business opportunities, “I am giving out my business cards to ensure continuous collaboration with other farmers in the region.”

Engaging with policymakers

The event was an excellent opportunity to engage with policy makers. At the opening ceremony of the fair, Seydou Nassouri, Chief of Staff of the Burkina Faso Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources, Sanitation and Food Security, stated: “It is necessary for humanity to establish new ways of living and not to perish”.

Later that day, François Lompo, the Minister of Agriculture, Water Resources, Sanitation and Food Security, visited the stands of all the farmer innovators. “The challenge for us is to discover new skills and attitudes in terms of practices and techniques to improve food security in Sahelian countries.”

The Ouagadougou Declaration includes recommendations and commitments made by farmer organisations, national research institutions, development agencies, and donors from five countries in West Africa who attended the workshop on farmer-led research: “We pledge that research by and with men and women farmers is institutionalised within the national and subnational agricultural strategies and policies, while recognising the importance and value of local innovation.”

A study (see <http://fipao.faso-dev.net/?p=457>) completed at FIPAO by Prolinnova/PROFEIS on farmers’ perspectives on the capacity to innovate underscores the need for the engagement of policymakers. “There should be a change in mentality amongst policymakers and they should do what is needed to support local knowledge and farmers’ innovations,” emphasises Lassané Savadogo, a farmer innovator from Burkina Faso.

Innovations

Among the innovations being shown at the Fair were a drink made from



Café de niebe - ground cow pea coffee.

Credit Assane Ouedraogo



Amevor Kankoe Gagnon from Togo shows off his innovation, “ la canne planteuse”, an agricultural tool which allows both sowing and application of fertiliser.

Credit Assane Ouedraogo

cowpeas and an incubator (see boxes).

One of the seven side events at the fair, screened video films sponsored by the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation ACP-EU (CTA). One of the films made by Agrecol Afrique (PROFEIS, Senegal) featured the use of *Nguigu*s shrubs as a shelter for planting mango trees in dry areas. Mango trees planted alone usually die, but mango seedlings planted among *Nguigu*s shrubs have greater chances of surviving the dry season even without watering. The mango tree roots benefit from the water drawn up from deeper levels by the roots of the *Nguigu*s shrubs.

Another innovation which was captured on video was about a mulch made from leaves from the shea tree

(known locally as *karité*). The mulch is used to grow sorghum by Tani Lankoandé, a female farmer from Sagadou, a region located in the East of Burkina Faso. The mulch improves and maintains soil fertility for crop production and the survival of young trees.

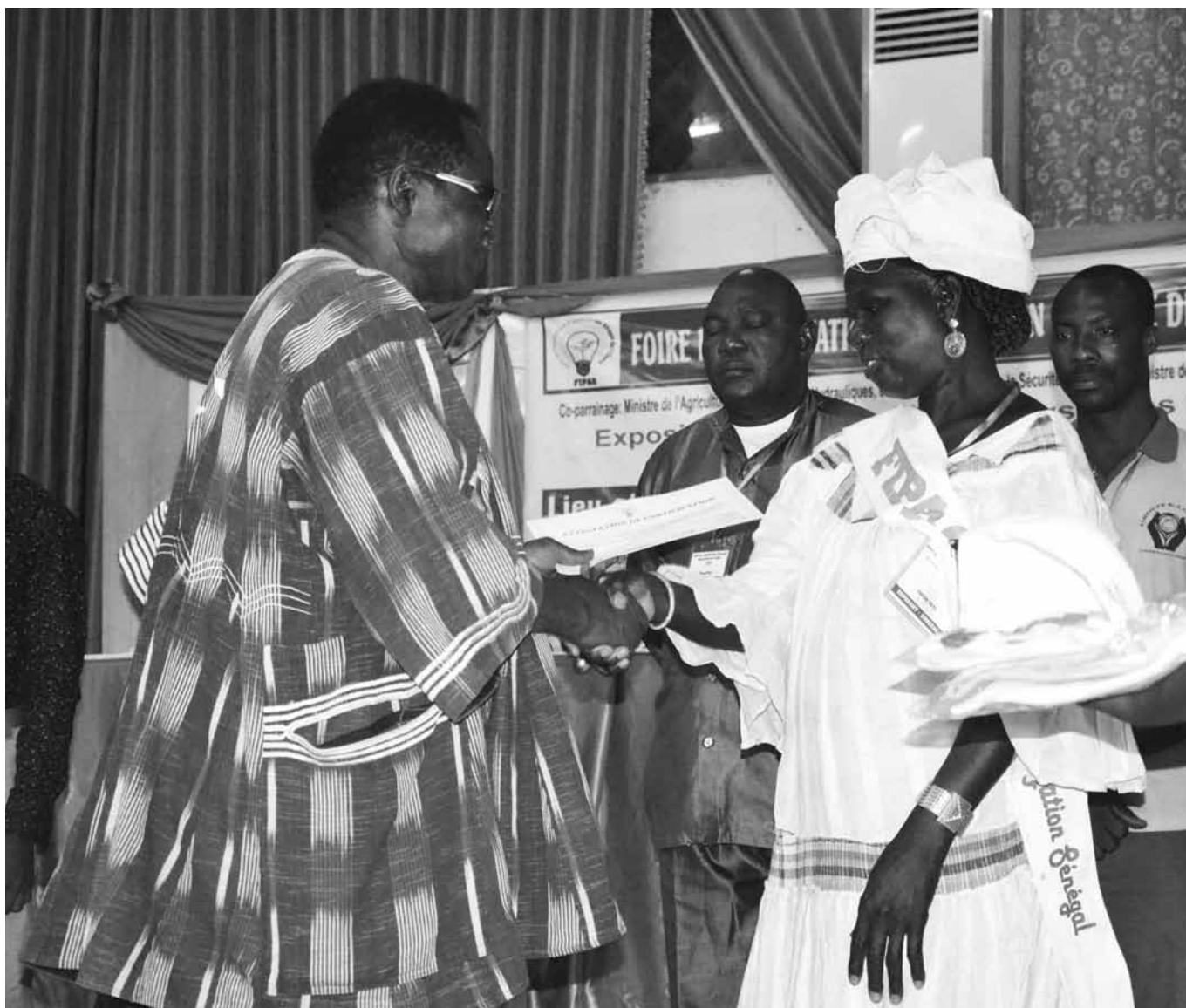
Debates about the videos revolved around intellectual property rights to these innovations, possibilities of adopting or adapting farmer innovations in different contexts, and the interactions between formal researchers, development practitioners and farmer innovators.

Winners of the best innovator awards

A diverse jury consisting of representatives from government bodies, donors,

farmer innovators, farmer organisations, a representative from the hosting organisation and research institutes joined forces to select the best farmer innovators at the fair. They examined each innovation, made a tour and talked to all farmers. The criteria they used were originality; technical, environmental and economic viability; and relevance.

At the closing ceremony on the final day of FIPAO, five innovations were awarded prizes according to themes such as crop production, animal production, natural resource management, processing of agro-sylvo-pastoral products, and others (including agricultural mechanisation, institutional innovation and communication).



Fatou Seye, a farmer from Senegal, receiving her certificate for her innovation: cow pea coffee - Café de niebe.

Credit Gabriela Quiroga

The prize winners were Coulibaly Sidiki from Mali for his innovation on grafting of the two plant species *N'pegou* and *N'gounan*; Salfou Sibiri Ouédraogo from Burkina Faso for herbal treatment of livestock diseases; Hamadou Oumarou from Niger for his aquatic weed cutting technique; Fatou Seye from Senegal for the cowpea coffee and Amevor Kankoé Gagnon from Togo for *la canne planteuse*, an agricultural tool which allows both sowing and application of fertiliser. Three innovators also received a special mention.

Several farmers were invited to speak on national television – an unique opportunity to reach a much wider audience and a memorable experience for them.

Joseph Abarike, a farmer innovator from Ghana, believes that the fairs should continue so that more farmers are given an opportunity to present their ideas to the outside world: *“Farmer innovators should be recognised, motivated, encouraged and empowered to deliver messages around them. FIPAO was a learning platform to help farmers to do this.”*

A generation-to-generation improved egg incubator

Nouhoum Traore is 43 and lives in Djela village in the Ségou region of Mali. Inspired by a wooden egg incubator (with a capacity of 140–150 eggs) that he inherited from his father, he has constructed a larger incubator made of clay. In contrast to the wooden egg incubator, the clay incubator can conserve heat better and is cheaper to build.

With a capacity of 400–500 eggs, the clay incubator allows for more guinea fowls to be kept on the farm, whereby more revenue is generated. The hatching of hen's eggs is usually completed in 20 days, while guinea fowl's eggs hatch in 25 days. Eggs are marked and turned around morning and evening so that each side is warmed by the indoor heat. Using a thermometer, the internal temperature is continuously checked and kept at 38 - 39 degrees centigrade. A good-quality lamp placed in the egg incubator is covered with a metal sheet, which is wrapped in a bag or board to prevent contact with the surrounding air which could bring about fluctuations in the internal temperature.

Another reason the clay incubator is very interesting is its easy diffusion. The egg incubator is built with local materials using little effort and investment, making it very attractive for other farmers to adopt it. In addition, farmers can choose the size of the incubator according to the number of eggs they wish to hatch. Farmers from the surrounding villages of Beneni, Kurale, and Pogola have already started adopting (and probably also adapting) the innovation.

Under the PROFEIS (Promoting Farmer Experimentation and Innovation in the Sahel) programme, the NGO, ADAF-Gallè in Mali has helped Nouhoum meet with other farmers, researchers and extension agents to improve and diffuse his innovation.

From cowpeas to coffee

Coffee made with cowpeas – how would that taste? The women's group in the village of Femboul near the city of Thiès in Senegal had long observed the habits of the Senegalese, who are big coffee drinkers, and thought it might be possible to win them over to this new product.

It all started as part of a campaign to fight indebtedness, when a union of farmer groups called “Union des Groupements Paysans de Meckhé” (UPGM) organised a competition to encourage women to experiment with preparing popular dishes and drinks using locally available products. The women's group in Femboul came up with the idea of making a popular drink from cowpeas.

The women cleaned and roasted cowpeas and then pounded them to powder, which was put into plastic bags. After mixing the powder with water and then filtering it, the cowpea coffee was ready to drink, either hot or cold. Marketing the drink proved more complex than expected as it was difficult to convince consumers to integrate cowpea coffee into their daily diet. For instance, there were questions about possible effects on human health (although cowpeas are not toxic and are in fact highly nutritious and a part of the Senegalese daily diet). Packaging the coffee was also not easy, as the quantity of packaging bags were limited.

Nevertheless, cowpea coffee has found its place among consumers in the village. This innovation has encouraged women to become more involved in managing soil fertility by using organic manure to grow cowpeas. It has also led to an expansion of the area sown to cowpeas. Women have diversified their sources of income and making this new drink has added value to cowpea and promoted the consumption of local products by the Senegalese.

For more information about FIPAO, visit the website: <http://fipao.faso-dev.net>

More details about Prolinnova can be seen at: <http://prolinnova.net/>

The seven organisations which co-organised the fair were: AgriProFocus (APF) Netherlands; CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CAAFS); McKnight Foundation's Collaborative Crop Research Program (CCRP) Community of Practice in West Africa; Misereor, Germany; Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC); Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation ACP-EU (CTA), L'Association Burkinabè des Journalistes et Communicateurs Agricoles (ABJCA).

The video films can be viewed at: <http://fipao.faso-dev.net/?cat=18>

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