



Agongnon Jérôme Hounwanou

2021 One Planet Laureate Candidate

Position

Consultant - researcher

Institution

Laboratory of Rural Economy
and Social Sciences for
Sustainable Development
(LERSSoDD)

Country

Benin

Education

Msc, in rural economy and
sociology, Faculty of Agronomy,
University of Parakou, Benin

Mentor

Prof. Dr. Afouda Jacob Yabi,
Director, School of Agronomy
and Water Science, University of
Parakou, Benin

Research Area

Agro socioeconomics of
development and gender.

Since 2017, Agongnon Jérôme Hounwanou has been providing research assistance in the socio-economics of development to the Laboratoire d'Economie Rurale et de Sciences Sociales pour le Développement Durable (LERSSoDD), located at the National University of Agriculture in Benin.

The Beninese agro-economist is a consultant-researcher for several organizations in the rural world. He is mainly working on food and nutritional security issues, climate change, the development of value-added chains, agricultural financing, and the dissemination and adoption of technologies/innovations in the farming community.

Agongnon is also a certified cashew expert, with certification from the Competitive Cashew Initiative (ComCashew) and the African Cashew Alliance (ACA). In addition, he is a certified Small and Medium Enterprises Business Training and Coaching Loop Coach, a qualification from the Green Innovation Centres for the Agri-Food Sector (ProCIVA/GIZ).

An author of several scientific publications, he has also participated in several international conferences, including the Regional Youth Consultation on Peace and Security in West and Central Africa organized by the United Nations in 2017, and the third Pan African Youth Conference by the African Youth Commission held in 2019.

Agongnon also participated in the Continental Summit on Amplifying Youth Voices by the Southern African Alumni Network held the same year, and the International Seminar on Freedom: The Antidote to Violent Extremism organized by Libre Afrique and Audace Institut Afrique in 2017.

To date, he has more than seven years of experience in supporting young agripreneurs.

His research focuses on food and nutrition security, climate change, development of value chains, and dissemination and adoption of technologies/innovations in the farming community.

He is even more passionate about two recent research projects, the first of which is "Farming practices and producers' perception of the adoption of technologies to control fruit flies (*Bactrocera dorsalis*) in North Benin." The research was conducted within the regional fruit fly management project in West Africa (PRMF) framework, which developed and disseminated four major innovations: the GF-120 product, the sanitary method, the mass trapping method, and weaver ants. The second project is "The survey and socio-economic reference study carried out as part of Project No. 3 of the National Agricultural Research Project (NARP) 2020-2024, which aims to develop integrated pest management for tomato, chili, and gboma crops, three solanaceous plants in Benin."

He was born in 1992 in Ouèssé, in the center of Benin, the hilly region, where he went to primary school. After his primary school certificate (CEP), he took the entrance exam to a military school of excellence but was unsuccessful. Being the eldest son of farmers and coming from a large family, Agongnon naturally worked in the fields to help his parents. Education was not on the agenda, but his paternal grandmother decided otherwise. The latter took her grandson under her wing and paid his school fees from kindergarten onwards, against his parents' wishes.

Agongnon tells the story of his late illiterate grandmother with great emotion and pays her a glowing tribute. When Agongnon's father was a child, she could not pay his school fees financially. She did not want the same pattern to be repeated with her first grandchild. This desire to make up for the past fundamentally motivated her to enroll her grandson Jérôme in school. This turned out to be a very proactive act.

Agongnon has, of course, been farming all of his childhood, especially throughout the school holidays. Despite the difficult conditions in the field, he recalls developing a passion for the job at an early age.

For his secondary studies after the BEPC, he left for Parakou, a large town in northern Benin, where he obtained his scientific baccalaureate, choosing to study natural sciences. He enrolled at the University of Parakou, specifically in the Faculty of Agronomy in Rural Economics and Sociology. He subsequently obtained a professional degree and then a professional master's degree, both in agronomic sciences focusing on rural economics and sociology, in 2014 and 2018, respectively.

Agriculture is a pillar of development. It represents a vital issue for the African economy in general and Benin (32.7% on average) in particular. Production is fundamental to ensuring food security, he explains. In light of this, choosing this sector was obvious for Agongnon. Aware of contemporary challenges, he wished to deepen his knowledge while making a modest contribution to the main development lever.

Agongnon defines a scientist as one who produces knowledge and is inventive or innovative. In a way, he admits that he always wanted to be a scientist. But for this to happen, he believes that the necessary support and resources are essential.

Nevertheless, he remains motivated by developing models for the profitability and modernization of family farms. His interest in this field lies in the fact that there are dynamics at the rural level that the tools of agro-economics can only understand.

In his earlier research, Agongnon was appalled to see huge crop losses in market gardens when the country was experiencing increasing food insecurity.

To address this, he cites highly relevant and successful biological control research commissioned by the Institut National des Recherches Agricoles du Bénin (INRAB) on pests that destroy chili, tomato, and gboma.

Agongnon's research interest lies in the fact that there are dynamics at the rural level that the tools of agro-economics can only understand. His research, therefore, focuses on issues related to food and nutrition security, climate change, value chain development, and technology/innovation diffusion and adoption in the agricultural community.

He visited all of Benin's market garden production sites to propose solutions to the problem.

In 2018, he was awarded a Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung scholarship to attend the Benin Young Leaders Programme dedicated to intensive political, economic, and social leadership training.

"Small-scale farmers in rural areas are the backbone of our food security," he insists. Agongnon still considers himself a member of the rural world, to which he feels a strong emotional attachment.

He worked for four years as a consultant for an NGO, within the framework of the Integrated National School Feeding Programme (PNASI) set up by the Beninese government and implemented by the World Food Programme (WFP), in social intermediation and school canteen management with several communities in the area of Zou, in the south of Benin, traveling through the nine communes.

From the outset, Agongnon acknowledges that he was fortunate to apply for this wonderful program. "It's great to be a laureate candidate," he says enthusiastically. He learned about the One Planet Fellowship through an old friend whom he reconnected during a scientific conference in Johannesburg, South Africa. He now collaborates and shares opportunities with his old friend and colleague.

His burning desire is to become a benchmark in science, in this case, Professor of Agro-economics in the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES) universities.

In the medium term, Agongnon aspires to be the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.

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In the long term, his objective is clear and ambitious. He wants to create an Institute for Environmental and Climate Research (IREC) that will provide innovative solutions to the problems faced by rural communities.

Agongnon expresses his sincere thanks to AWARD for this great initiative, the One Planet Fellowship, which has come at the perfect moment for him.

At the same time, he feels the need to reinvent himself. From a personal development point of view, Agongnon, who loves to learn, stresses the need to hone his expertise and leadership skills; this includes communication, public speaking, and effective human resource management.

Agongnon expresses the need to acquire or consolidate specialized skills in agriculture, climate change, and research methodology (scientific writing, mobilization of funding) regarding the scientific component. It should be noted that the integration of professional networks remains a determining factor in achieving his objectives.

With the skills acquired through AWARD training, he expects to become renowned within his institution. In this way, he intends to contribute to demystifying research for his staff. His goal is to positively impact his staff's professional environment by guiding and becoming a source of information, expertise, and inspiration. Agongnon is convinced that if young people have role models, they can engage meaningfully in research.

Food insecurity is close to his heart, especially the paradox of rural households who are the most affected by it, yet represent the backbone of agricultural production.

This grant will help to provide solutions to the challenges his community faces. In addition, he aims to set up an organization dedicated to supporting rural communities and modernizing family farms to cope with food insecurity and the adverse effects of climate change. His concrete actions dedicated to assisting small-scale producers help to remedy this problem.

Agongnon is also concerned about another phenomenon: taking Arab land from small-scale producers, undermining family farming.

This is why it seems crucial to him to support them and to make their voices heard when defining favorable agricultural policies.

The challenges Agongnon faces in scientific research are access to proper information and key resource persons. Finally, financial, institutional, and technical support are also obstacles to be surmounted. For example, politicians do not mobilize as many resources for research as they do for sportsmen and women in other fields.

Agongnon's solutions to these multiple challenges include learning independently, being creative, taking specialized training, seeking other opportunities, and securing consultancy contracts.

Agongnon Jérôme Hounwanou is one of the growing number of candidates selected to participate in the One Planet Fellowship. The One Planet Fellowship is a career development initiative that is building a robust pipeline of highly connected, inter-generational scientists equipped to use a gender lens to help Africa's smallholder farmers cope with climate change. The One Planet Fellowship is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the BNP Paribas Foundation, the European Union and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) and Agropolis Fondation are jointly implementing the Fellowship.

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