IsDB MERIT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM FOR HIGH TECHNOLOGY (MSP) FOR IsDB MEMBER COUNTRIES

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SUCCESS STORY

CREATING IMPACT FOR CAMEROON

SIDONIE FAMENI TOPÉ



“It’s always been my dream to contribute to agricultural development in my country, and my research felt like a practical way to do that.”

Driven by a passion for sustainable agriculture and biodiversity, Prof. Sidonie Fameni Topé has dedicated her research to understanding the vital role of pollinating insects in food production. With support from the IsDB Merit Scholarship Program for High Technology, she conducted postdoctoral research focused on improving crop yields through pollinator conservation at the University of Maroua, Cameroon, in 2020. Her work bridges science and society – empowering farmers, training students, and shaping national conservation strategies in Cameroon.

RESEARCH IN ACTION

CREATING IMPACT FOR CAMEROON

Name: Sidonie Fameni Topé
Nationality: Cameroonian
Scholarship: IsDB Merit Scholarship Program for High Technology
Field of study: Biodiversity
Year of scholarship award: 2020
University: University of Maroua – Cameroon
Current position: Associate Professor



"I faced real difficulties in securing funding for my postdoctoral work. Even when I had a solid project proposal, it was hard to find the financial support I needed to move forward."

Prof. Sidonie Fameni Topé, a biodiversity researcher from Cameroon, has spent much of her academic life studying the relationship between plants and the insects that pollinate them. Her work explores how pollinating insects contribute to food security and sustainable agriculture. This is a pressing issue, given the crucial role that pollinators play in healthy crop development, and the many threats to insect populations all over the world. Thanks to a postdoctoral fellowship from the IsDB Merit Scholarship Program, she was able to deepen this research and expand its real-world impact.

"The focus of my postdoctoral work was to evaluate the diversity of beneficial floricultural insects in two key crops – tomato (*Solanum lycopersicum*) and false sesame (*Ceratotheca sesamoides*)," she explains. The research was conducted in Maroua University, in the Far North region of Cameroon, where both crops are widely cultivated. "It's always been my dream to contribute to agricultural development in my country, and this research felt like a practical way to do that."



OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

But the path to that research was not easy. "I faced real difficulties in securing funding for my postdoctoral work," she says. "Even when I had a solid project proposal, it was hard to find the financial support I needed to move forward." Beyond that, access to basic scientific infrastructure was another obstacle. "At one point, I had collected insect specimens but had no lab to carry out the taxonomy. Without the proper facilities, the project couldn't advance."

The IsDB Merit Scholarship changed that. It enabled Prof. Sidonie Fameni Topé to carry out the fieldwork, analyse her data, and share her findings at the 28th Annual Biosciences Conference at the University of Dschang, Cameroon, in 2021. Her presentation – "*Diversity and impact of flowering insects on Solanum lycopersicum (Solanaceae) and Ceratotheca sesamoides (Pedaliaceae) yields in Maroua (Far North, Cameroon)*" – showcased the relevance of pollinator research for agriculture in the region. The findings have since been recognised as valuable by both the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) and the Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation (MINRESI), contributing to national strategies for improving crop productivity.

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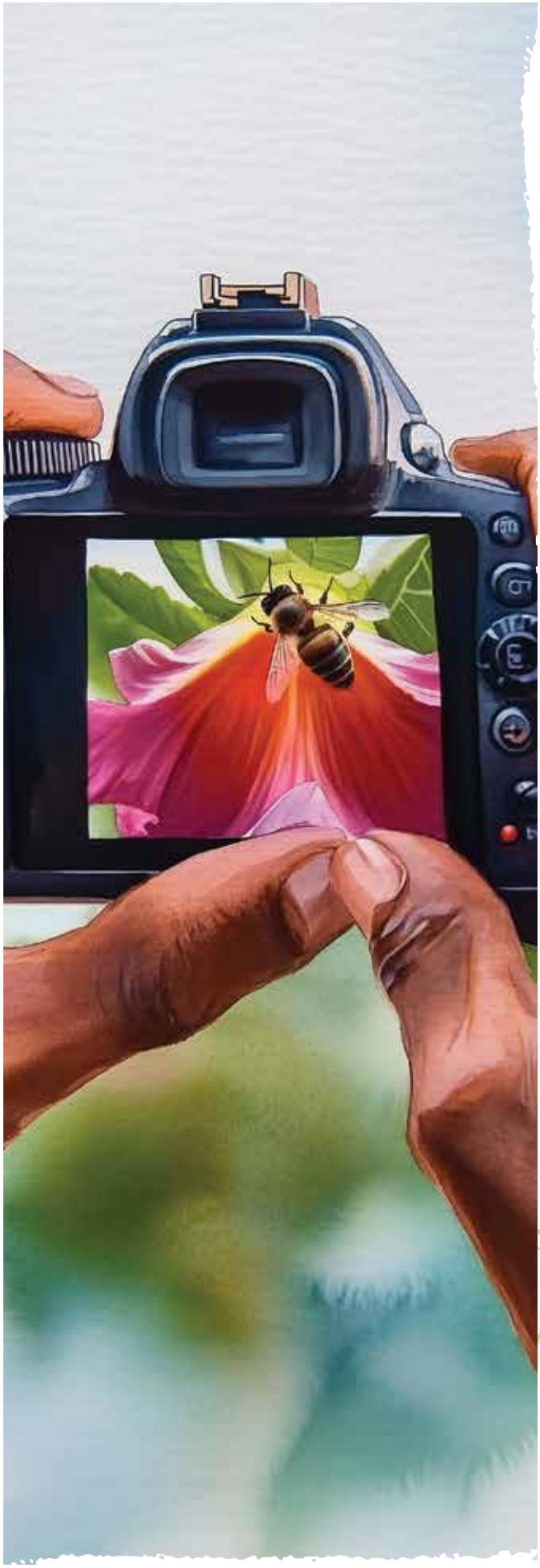
PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT

As a female scientist rooted in her community, Prof. Sidonie Fameni Topé's work reflects a deep commitment not only to scientific discovery but also to improving lives. Her story also highlights how the IsDB scholarship allowed her to advance her research without having to leave her family or relocate abroad.

Meanwhile, she also saw benefits to her professional advancement. "It strengthened the portfolio I submitted for promotion," she says. "As of January 2024, I've been appointed Associate Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Maroua."

Her work doesn't end in the lab or the lecture hall. One of her central goals is to raise awareness among farmers about the importance of pollinating insects. "Most farmers don't realise that pollinators can significantly boost yields," she says. "We train them to protect these insects and reduce the use of harmful pesticides."

With her research team, she is also studying the diversity of pollinating insects in three natural reserves across Cameroon, in an effort to inform national conservation strategies. A major part of that initiative is a project called Plant-Pollinator Biodiversity Data in Cameroon, hosted on the iNaturalist platform, supported by JRS Biodiversity Foundation Grant N°70054. The project trains students, conservation staff, and postgraduate researchers in skills ranging from field data collection and specimen curation to biodiversity informatics and scientific writing.



COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The project is not just about capacity-building – it's also about community. "We encourage students and farmers to upload photos of pollinators and their forage plants," she explains. This hands-on, participatory approach helps create early awareness in students and instils practical knowledge among farmers – a critical step in building sustainable agricultural systems.

For Prof. Sidonie Fameni Topé, this blend of scientific research and public engagement is central to her mission. "I believe researchers have a responsibility to ensure their work makes a real-world difference," she says. "That's why I work not only with data, but with people – with the students, farmers, and institutions that can put knowledge into practice."

This approach has guided her decision to pursue her fellowship locally, ensuring her research is grounded in the needs and realities of her own community. It's a model of science that is not only professional, but directly supported and validated by those it seeks to benefit.

ADVICE TO OTHERS

Her message to current and future IsDB scholars is one of focus, humility, and purpose: "Commit fully to the project you've been entrusted with. Think about how your work can help your country move forward. And once you've gained that knowledge, don't keep it to yourself – share it. Inspire others. That's how real change happens."

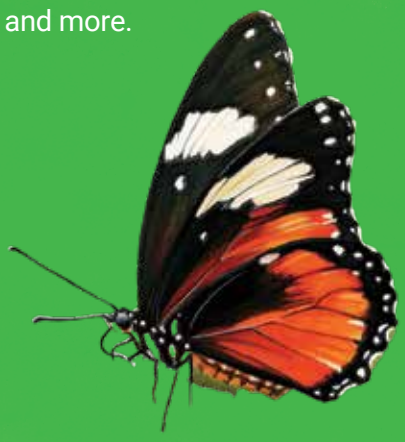
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COULD YOU BE NEXT?

We hope this story has inspired you. If you are a promising researcher or academic from an IsDB member country with a passion for science, technology, and innovation, the IsDB Merit Scholarship Program for High Technology could help you take your work to the next level.

The program supports PhD studies (up to 3 years) and postdoctoral research (6–12 months) in applied science and technology fields such as biotechnology, computer science, renewable energy, agriculture, water resources, environmental technology, and more.



To be eligible, you must:

- Be from an IsDB member country
- Be under 35 for PhD, or under 40 for postdoctoral research
- Be affiliated with an academic or research institution in your home country
- Have a strong academic record and research background
- Propose a research project relevant to your country's development needs

The scholarship covers tuition, living stipend, health insurance, conference support, and travel.

Successful applicants must commit to returning home after their research and applying their knowledge for national development.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

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www.isdb.org/scholarships

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Sidonie Fameni Topé

GET INVOLVED

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