

SUCCESS STORIES

PROUDLY AGRIPRENEURS!

LEARNING FROM 24 YOUNG
AFRICAN BUSINESS LEADERS



“

Youth is one of CTA's three areas of intervention...
By focusing on the new generation, CTA is helping
to accelerate the fight against underemployment
and youth unemployment, while strengthening the
agricultural sector.

”

Michael Hailu,
CTA Director

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This booklet highlights key elements of the publication *Ils l'ont fait !* published by CTA in collaboration with MediaProd from Burkina Faso, which outlines the achievements of 24 entrepreneurs that have been featured by Agribusiness TV. CTA wants to reveal the impacts these agripreneurs have had, and encourage other young people to take inspiration, so they too can better invest their efforts in agriculture.

The booklet introduces the 24 young entrepreneurs and explains how they are addressing the key youth agriprenership challenges they are facing.

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PREFACE

Young people in agriculture: the key to strengthening Africa's future

Across Africa, young and innovative entrepreneurs are channelling their energy into a vast array of agricultural initiatives. Their goal is clear: to create new economic opportunities and to contribute to the development of their communities. Yet because these agripreneurs often work out of public view, their contribution is not always fully appreciated by their communities.

To inspire other young people, in 2016 CTA supported the creation of Agribusiness TV following a call for projects launched as part of its ARDYIS programme. The objective was not only to promote the development of the businesses of young agripreneurs, but also to showcase their experiences and encourage young Africans to consider agriculture as a vocation.

“

This publication comes from CTA's desire to further highlight the methods and achievements of a number of entrepreneurs to inspire others, and bring them to a wider audience of both young people and those involved in agricultural entrepreneurship. ”

I am pleased to report that Agribusiness TV has been a resounding success. The stories published in this book show that it has helped to promote young entrepreneurs and enable them to reach new clients and establish themselves in markets that were still unexplored, while at the same time reaching other young Africans. Through these video stories, some were able to talk to entrepreneurs and find ways to overcome the challenges they faced, while others simply embarked on the great adventure of agripreneurship by drawing inspiration from shared experiences. As a sign of its success, Agribusiness TV has received many international awards, including the 2017 WSIS Forum Prize from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and the Prix francophone de l'innovation dans les médias (Francophone Award for Innovation in the Media) from Radio France Internationale and the Agence internationale de la Francophonie (International Organisation for the French-Speaking World).



This publication comes from CTA's desire to further highlight the methods and achievements of a number of entrepreneurs to inspire others, and bring them to a wider audience of both young people and those involved in agricultural entrepreneurship. Supporting young people in this sector is a CTA priority, which can only be effective if we better understand the fundamental aspirations of this generation, the challenges they face and the strategies they choose to implement. Beyond highlighting the entrepreneurs and charting their individual paths, each story raises questions as varied and as crucial as access to finance, the impact of the activities carried out, relations built with other young people, and the use of digital technologies in agripneurship.

Youth is one of CTA's three areas of intervention, and we therefore implement a number of programmes to develop agricultural entrepreneurship among this group: AgriHack Talent, PEJERIZ in Senegal and Mali, VijaBiz in Kenya, and DAIRY Profit in Eastern Africa. By focusing on the new generation, CTA is helping to accelerate the fight against underemployment and youth unemployment, while strengthening the agricultural sector.

All these programmes are already bearing fruit, but a huge amount of work remains to be done. It is essential for all partners to collaborate, together with young people, to give them every opportunity to make the greatest impact, locally, nationally and globally. CTA is ready to contribute. Enjoy this booklet!

Michael Hailu
Director



INTRODUCTION

With a population of more than 1 billion, Africa is one of the youngest and most dynamic continents in the world. Sixty per cent of Africa's population is under the age of 35, with 420 million people between the ages of 15 and 35, a figure expected to double by 2040.

Over the next decade, 11 million young people are expected to enter the workforce in Africa every year, yet only 3 million formal jobs are created annually. Millions of young people therefore run the risk of being unemployed or underemployed. At the same time, urban areas continue to attract young people from rural areas, while not always being able to create enough job opportunities.

For many African countries, however, agriculture is and will continue to be the main source of employment and income for the foreseeable future. Agriculture represents around 60% of employment on the continent, making it a fundamental sector, not only for food security but also for economic growth. The wider agricultural sector remains an important source of employment in rural areas, of course, but also in peri-urban and urban areas. It is particularly important to increase agri-food processing initiatives aimed at reaching out to a changing urban clientele, and to increase opportunities for the creation of non-agricultural economic activities in the technology and services sector.

In spite of its potential, many young Africans are not attracted to agriculture because of its poor image, insecurity, and lack of competitiveness and support. The average age of farmers is currently

over 50, so it is vital that younger generations join a sector that is so essential to the economies and to the food and nutritional security of the entire continent. Africa can however already look to outstanding examples of talented young farmers. To spread the word about these exciting young people and inspire others to follow in their footsteps, Agribusiness TV – an initiative launched with the support of CTA – shows that it is possible to innovate, earn a living, and create jobs through agriculture.

Since its launch in May 2016, Agribusiness TV – a web TV platform – has been on the lookout for initiatives created by young farmers and entrepreneurs which it can highlight through short videos of around 5 minutes. To date, Agribusiness TV has produced and broadcast more than 100 videos, subtitled in English and French, from 12 African countries, mainly in West Africa. The videos cover five main themes: production, processing, green jobs, technologies and services, and nutrition.

By featuring the achievements of 24 entrepreneurs promoted by Agribusiness TV, and their rich range of initiatives, this publication aims to inspire other young people to invest their efforts in agriculture.





THE ENTREPRENEURS

Production

Thierno Souleymane Agne, 29, is a graduate in law and a horticultural technician. Keen to innovate in market gardening production, he set up an organic strawberry production company, FraiSen, in 2016 in the village of Benteigner in the Thies region of Senegal. Growing organic strawberries all year round for the Senegal market, FraiSen is working hard to compete with imported strawberries on an equal footing.

Boubacar Aliou Diallo is a 28-year-old telecoms engineer from Guinea. In September 2014, with the support of his family, he joined the agriculture sector and began to develop his farm in the rural commune of Khorira. In March 2017 he set up Safiagribusiness & Services, an agricultural company that combines market gardening and poultry farming, and has managed to make his dream of creating jobs come true.

Jean-Marie Kameni, 32, is a senior technician in agro-pastoral entrepreneurship, and a 2015 graduate from agricultural school. He began growing tomatoes in his village of Banwa Centre in the West region of Cameroon and is now known as the ‘tomato king’!

Richard Mone is 36 and from Burkina Faso. An agricultural engineer by training, in 2014 he started his Complexe agricole du Sahel (CAGRIS)

business in Loumbila, specialising in poultry farming, including moringa egg production. He has won several awards and works together with many institutions.

Danièle N’Da is a 35-year-old Beninese graduate in banking and finance, who now heads a vegetable farm in the commune of Abomey-Calavi in Benin. Her long-term goal is that her farm will become an incubator for ground-breaking innovations.

Alphonse Sié Palm, a 33-year-old from Burkina Faso, has a master’s degree in business development coaching and a master’s degree in management science from the University of Ouagadougou. Since leaving university, Alphonse has been raising Large White pigs where he grew up in the Sud-Ouest region of the country. He hopes to become one of Burkina Faso’s most successful farmers.

Processing

Halatou Dem is a 32-year-old Malian entrepreneur. With a degree in finance, in 2011 she took over management of Danaya Céréales, an agricultural processing and marketing company founded by her mother in 1992. With regional and international markets in her sights, the company is in the process of obtaining ISO certification.

Régis Ezin, 31, is from Benin and has a degree in intercultural management and translation.



Since 2013, Régis has been producing traditional snacks, but with a modern twist. His flagship product, Agonlin Kluiklui, has proved popular in Benin's major cities and in some other African capitals. His ambition is to become an African 'Nestlé'.

Emmanuel Deason Gbaou is a 35-year-old Ivorian entrepreneur with a degree in public law and political science. In 2010 he left his job to pursue a career in chocolate processing and in 2015 he created the Instant Chocolate company in the Cocody district of Abidjan, with a focus on research and development for the promotion of cocoa and chocolate products. Within 3 years he wants to be sourcing cocoa from 2,500 Ivorian cooperatives.

Odile Kossiba Gnonwin from Benin has a degree in business law and judicial administration. In 2012 she began to process tiger nuts in the commune of Abomey Calavi in the northern suburbs of Cotonou, and in 2016 launched the 100% 'Made in Benin' brand, Norée.

Caroline Hien is a 27-year-old Ivorian entrepreneur. She began producing tropical fruit jams in March 2015 through her company, Carol's Confiture, which is based in Abidjan, and has set her sights on creating a distribution network for her products in Europe.

Ange Stéphane Kouam Fondjio is a 36-year-old Cameroonian with a master's degree in industrial economics. He took the plunge into agricultural entrepreneurship in January 2013 with an innovative product – coconut chips – and 4 years later launched his company, Manufacture Industrielle du Cameroun (MICAM) in Yaoundé, focusing on two main

activities: agri-food and packaging for manufactured products.

Ismaël Mamoudou Tanko is a 33-year-old Togolese entrepreneur. Armed with a degree in management, and after four years of research, he launched a business processing tomatoes into puree in 2016. He is now the director of Timati, which promotes the flagship brand Tanko Timati.

“
For many African countries, however, agriculture is and will continue to be the main source of employment and income for the foreseeable future.”

Sonita Tossou, 26, has a master's degree in pharmacology. Based in the Sainte-Rita neighbourhood of Cotonou, Benin, she and her husband created Fenou Foods in 2016, specialising in the promotion of locally-processed products. The couple is also working to help other young agripreneurs by connecting them with distributors and providing them with advice.

Green jobs and nutrition

Ollasset Djoro Ahoua, 29, has a degree in tropical agriculture. In 2009 she launched her career in organic market gardening in the town of Agnibilekrou, in eastern Côte d'Ivoire.

Elizabeth Gikebe is a 27-year-old Kenyan. A graduate in commerce and information technology, in 2016 she founded Mhogo Foods, an agri-food



processing company specialising in gluten-free cassava production, based in Banana, in Kiambu.

Grâce-Marlène Gnintoungbe is a 30-year-old Beninese entrepreneur. Her agricultural company, Les Jardins Chez Marlène, which is based in the town of Abomey-Calavi, specialises in organic fruit and vegetable production.

Mohamed Ouedraogo is a 38-year-old entrepreneur who works in the commune of Kaya in Burkina Faso. In August 2012 he started producing and processing products using moringa, a shrub known for its high nutritional value, before creating his own company, Yeepaoum Production.

Samuel Rigu is a 29-year-old Kenyan entrepreneur with a degree in agribusiness management. In 2015 he founded Safi Organics Kenya, based in Mwea, Kirinyaga, specialising in the production of organic fertilisers made from crop waste.

Fresnellia Sagbo is from Benin and has a doctorate in biochemistry and food technologies. In 2012 she launched Unité de Production Agroalimentaire Freshy, specialising in local fruit juices. With a production site in Porto Novo her company produces more than 500 bottles of fruit juice a day.

Roméo Yao Dou is a 38-year-old Ivorian agronomist and microbiologist, who created a company in 2011 – Microfertile – that manufactures 100% organic fertilisers using earthworms and recycling cocoa waste.

Technologies and services

Awa Caba is a 30-year-old entrepreneur from Senegal. A design engineer in computer training, in September 2014 she co-founded Sooretul, a Dakar-based digital start-up, specialising in the promotion and marketing of agricultural products processed by Senegalese women.

Flavien Kouatcha Simo is a 29-year-old from Cameroon, and an engineer by training. Based in the outskirts of Douala, in 2015 he founded a start-up specialising in the design of aquaponics kits, Save Our Agriculture.

Claude Arsène Savadogo is a 32-year-old from Burkina Faso, with a master's degree in rural economics and agri-food business strategy, and another in economic and financial engineering of projects and public policies. In 2011, he created Bioprotect, a company producing and marketing organic inputs and pesticides, based in Fada N'Gourma.





1 NEGATIVE IMAGE OF AGRICULTURE

Agriculture has a poor image across Africa which inhibits youth engagement.

2 WEAK ACCESS TO CAPITAL

Financing is critical in developing and growing a business but agripreneurs are often faced with high interest rates or are not seen to be a sound investment choice.

3 BUSINESS MODEL CHALLENGES

Many entrepreneurs have no business management capacity which prevents them from innovating and achieving sustainable profitability.

4 LACK OF TECHNICAL CAPACITY

Many young agripreneurs do not have technical expertise in the sector in which they have chosen to launch a business and have limited funds to secure additional training.

5 SCALING-UP DIFFICULTIES

It is very difficult to grow from a micro-enterprise into a robust small or medium-sized enterprise. Many youth businesses stagnate as they struggle to make this jump.



10 KEY CHALLENGES OF YOUNG AGRIPRENEURS

WEAK CONSUMPTION OF LOCAL FOODS 7

Imported goods are often cheaper and better presented, so convincing consumers to eat local products developed by agripreneurs is a real challenge.

CLIMATE CHANGE 9

For a sector that relies so heavily on the weather, the impacts of climate change are a real risk for already fragile youth agribusinesses.

LACK OF SKILLED STAFF 6

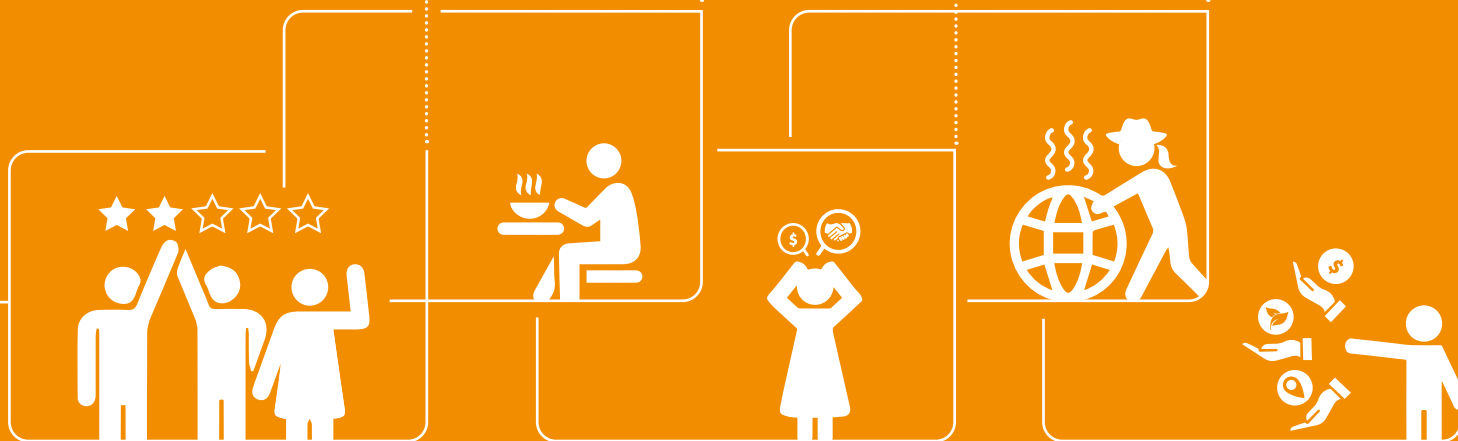
Employing, developing and retaining skilled staff is difficult, especially when a business is not yet profitable and cannot afford high wage costs.

WEAK INTEGRATION IN THE VALUE CHAINS 8

Young people are vulnerable as they work to build their reputation, they have few assets and struggle to build key partnerships to access profitable markets or capacity building.

INADEQUATE POLICIES 10

Taxation is often a heavy burden for start-up businesses, which also face ineffective agricultural support. Women in many communities often also struggle with accessing land.



ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

Young entrepreneurs face many challenges in developing successful businesses. A lack of financing, human resources, expertise, technology and access to markets are just some of the 10 challenges the 24 agripreneurs have highlighted, along with some strategies and solutions they devised to overcome them.

1. A negative image of farming... which starts from school

Across Africa, farming has a very poor image; too often seen as a career for those who have not been to school. Education systems often do not encourage young people to take risks but instead seek the comfort of the civil service, or simple private-sector employment. Agripreneurs are unanimous:

“Our education system plants the seeds of discouragement: in primary school those who failed to move up to the next grade were sent back to their families and told they might as well go and farm the land.”

2. A lack of understanding among family and friends

As agripreneurs work to make their businesses a success, the role of their family, friends, teachers and colleagues is decisive. In many cases, family and friends do not understand the potential of agriculture and do everything they can to convince them to give up their farming project.

“When I told my parents that I wanted to give up my law studies to launch a career in agriculture, my father stopped

talking to me for almost two months,” says Souleymane from Senegal.

Sonita from Benin had a similar experience.

“My parents couldn’t understand or accept that I was going into agri-food processing when I had job security at the pharmaceutical company where I worked; they even told me that they were willing to finance additional studies, but would not give me that money to invest in my company. It was really hard to convince them.” She found that her parents only began to change their minds when their friends began to see the benefits. *“When the Agribusiness TV video started to make the rounds on the internet, and my parents’ friends saw it, they started to praise me, and this went a long way to convincing my parents that what I was doing was worthwhile, whereas before they were saying ‘don’t let her do it!’”*

Richard from Burkina Faso recalls how his friends were initially not supportive: *“When I was starting out with my poultry business, I didn’t get any encouragement from my university friends. Yet today, my story has inspired two of these friends, whom I have shown how to develop their businesses.”*



Facing the challenge

The agripreneurs all agree that the best way to prove to family and friends that investing in agriculture is the right choice is to get training and carry out research to gain a full technical understanding of the field in which you want to invest. Agripreneurs need to be dedicated and take their enterprise seriously, and when success happens family and friends are usually convinced and their support follows.

In many cases family is the primary source of funding allowing a young agripreneur's business to expand, so it is therefore important to avoid head-on conflict with parents, and to find the right approach to explain the value of the decision.

3. Gender barriers

Women agripreneurs face an additional problem in crossing very significant cultural barriers, especially when they opt for a production activity which requires access to land: *"In our culture, women cannot inherit land, so this is an additional problem for investing,"* Ollasset from Côte d'Ivoire recalls. *"Personally, I had to leave my village and move far away from home to rent some land, because tradition wouldn't allow me to have land at home."*

4. Lack of profitability

Some of the 24 agribusinesses have managed to break-even, but a lack of profitability is a major issue for many companies. Profitability can be affected by various factors, including the need for investment to expand or scale up the company, poor management, the targeted category of consumers, wage costs, or more simply a low income.

"The key to accessing credit is to be able to provide a guarantee, especially a title deed; but in Burkina Faso the land tenure process is very slow and cumbersome, and even if you can afford to buy a plot, getting the papers takes time," Richard from Burkina Faso reveals. *"I began the process of acquiring my land in 2013, and I didn't get the paper until 2018."*

Facing the challenge

The agripreneurs' advise finding technical and commercial solutions to diversify sources of revenue, and increase the profitability of products:

- Tomato producer Jean-Marie from Cameroon works around three annual growing cycles to maximise his turnover.
- Ismaël from Togo is working to develop a new product from fresh tomatoes, targeting the broader population in order to increase his profits.
- Ollasset from Côte d'Ivoire has chosen to target off-season market gardening, which means she faces less competition at harvest time.
- Richard from Burkina Faso has successfully diversified by breeding rare poultry.
- In Senegal, Souleymane built his company on originality, as he was the first to grow strawberries, creating a niche that gives him a significant advantage.

5. Financing for scaling up

Financing is critical in the development of a business. Interestingly, the 24 agripreneurs found

that it is not so much the initial capital that is important – because this can be built up gradually – but the investment needed once the company has proved its technical ability, market demand is well established and the time has come to scale up. This is the point when increasing production capacity requires mechanisation, which means significant investments and specialised knowledge. Access to finance is also essential for businesses that require preliminary investment in research and development. Yet despite their innovative and promising ideas, entrepreneurs are often denied access to credit by banks. Roméo from Côte d'Ivoire faced this challenge when trying to develop his organic fertilisers using earthworms and cocoa waste.

Facing the challenge

Young agripreneurs have developed a wide range of strategies to finance their businesses and make them profitable:

- Looking for *funding (gifts or loans) among friends and family*: known as mobilising 'love money', or 'Family, Fools and Friends', this can provide a first investment to help launch a business. This was the approach adopted by Caroline from Côte d'Ivoire.
- Raising money through *crowdfunding or crowdlending*: this can be through dedicated websites (as in the case of Emmanuel from Côte d'Ivoire, who used this method to participate in the Salon du Chocolat in Paris), or informally by launching a call for financing through a Facebook page or WhatsApp group (see box, *The struggle to access finance*).

- Turning to '*business angels*': a kind of sponsor or financial partner who will provide financing and technical advice to young agripreneurs.
- Appeal for *sponsorship from private companies*.
- Keep a *salaried job or consultancy work* in order to ensure a stable or regular income that can be invested in the business: this was the path followed by Richard from Burkina Faso, who has a paid job at an NGO, and Awa from Senegal who does occasional consulting work, including for the United Nations.
- *Join a local tontine*, where each member pays a monthly subscription which then provides regular annuities that can be used for investment in the company, as in the case of Stéphane from Cameroon.
- Take part in *competitions* for the chance to win awards that generally take the form of grants (like Awa from Senegal); however, focusing too much on competitions could be harmful to the long-term development of the business.
- Bring in an *associate* to invest in part of the business, like Régis from Benin.

Nevertheless, the best strategy to get funding and develop a young enterprise is undoubtedly to offer quality products and efficient services that clients are prepared to pay a reasonable amount for on a regular basis. This should generate profits that can be reinvested when a company goes through harder times.



6. Shortage of well-trained and motivated human resources

Finding available, skilled and motivated human resources is a major challenge when it comes to starting a business. By itself, the motivation of the entrepreneur is not enough. As the business grows, an entrepreneur needs to be able to rely on a committed and responsible team. Qualified human resources are very expensive, and many agripreneurs opt to hire young people with few qualifications, whom they train as they go along. The agripreneur must also be careful not to be the only one who knows all the ins and outs of the business, leaving them unable to delegate when necessary. Trust in team members, employee supervision techniques and retention strategies, can all be significant challenges.

Testimonials

“Human resources are a major challenge, especially in livestock,” reveals Boubacar from Guinea. *“The problem is that young people just aren’t interested, there aren’t enough of them who want to study to become a vet, they prefer law or finance. It was really hard to find a technician for the farm. Most of the time, the people we find are already of a certain age, and are not up to date with new breeding techniques.”*

For Awa from Senegal, recruitment has also been a challenge. *“The development of our technology company requires us to be at the forefront of the latest expertise, and therefore to invest significantly, for example in setting up the database. To innovate in technology, we need to recruit, but this is really expensive. So for now when we recruit,*

THE STRUGGLE TO ACCESS FINANCE

Ismaël from Togo is director of Timati which processes tomatoes into purée. *“Investment needs are a recurring issue: until now, we mainly relied on ‘informal crowdfunding’ with friends and family, by posting on Facebook or through a ‘call for partners/contributors’ on WhatsApp groups,”* Ismaël explains. *“My first crowdfunding operation enabled me to collect 5 million CFA francs in August 2016; and in 2017, I was able to raise 20 million CFA francs (€30,500).”* For each person who agrees to financially support his project, Ismaël does things by the book. *“I draw up a contract with each personal lender, and if someone wants to go through a solicitor, this is possible, but at their expense.”*

Ismaël is currently working on an even more ambitious project which will require about 250 million CFA francs (€380,000). *“I plan to work with tomato growers, but in order to guarantee basic supplies, I want to start my own greenhouse production that will belong to the company,”* Ismaël explains. He also wants to improve the packaging of his product, offer other products that are more accessible for low-income consumers, and set up a tomato farm to ensure a basic supply for the company. To access the necessary funding, Ismaël has engaged in discussions with various institutions.

our selection criteria are not necessarily focusing on the diploma or the search for specific skills, but rather on motivation, with the aim of gradually training on the technical side.”

Danièle from Benin explains that the problems don't just stop once you have hired someone. *“Even if we train our employees, the problem is that after a few months they just leave, in spite of all the motivation techniques we have established,” she reveals.*

Facing the challenge

Employing, developing and retaining skilled staff is not easy, but young agripreneurs are implementing a wide range of solutions to overcome human resource challenges:

- Focus on motivation rather than CVs when recruiting. *“A recruiting process needs to test motivation, passion, honesty and integrity; even if your candidates are illiterate and untrained, you can support them,”* states Alphonse from Burkina Faso.
- Build up your own expertise, and ensure that a large pool of young people are provided with technical and professional training to provide a continuous flow of employees for the company. This was the strategy employed by Souleymane in Senegal and Roméo in Côte d'Ivoire, but using two different tracks. Souleymane set up his own training programme as part of his company, while Roméo established a partnership with a business incubator to recruit 300 young people ready to be trained (see chapter, Passing the baton...).
- Develop strategies to motivate staff and ensure they do not leave a company too soon. *“In parallel with my activity of producing fresh tomato puree, I set up*

a rabbit farm, and I hired a young employee who had already interned at the tomato processing plant, which allowed me to observe him and identify his potential.

In order to motivate him, I gave him an objective-linked contract with the prospect that he would take a share of the profits according to his performance,” Ismaël from Togo explains.

- Protect valuable company data. *“It's important to set up a secure, computerised client-management system, otherwise the marketing manager can take off with your client list and open their own business,”* warns Flavien from Cameroon.
- Implement employee supervision techniques. *“I need to make unannounced visits to the farm in order to keep an eye on things,”* reveals Richard from Burkina Faso. *“I've recently considered investing in video surveillance systems.”*
- Many entrepreneurs also recommend building up brand and company loyalty as a way to keep employees committed.

7. Technical and technological challenges

A lack of technical expertise in the sector in which an agripreneur aims to launch a business is a serious issue. Initially this may be due to technical constraints, such as access to land and water sources, land security, and external dependence on feed for livestock. There is also the issue that most young agripreneurs have not studied subjects connected to the farming activity in which they are investing. Many are graduates in law, finance, international relations and diplomacy, management, and pharmacology: all subjects that



mean the agripreneur has to train quickly as soon as they create their business.

Beyond the technical issues, agripreneurs also often face technological challenges, especially when they are innovating in a new field. *“One of the first challenges I faced was to find a blade on the market that would allow me to cut slices of coconut to turn into crisps,”* recalls Stéphane from Cameroon. Sonita from Benin faced similar challenges: *“When we started producing wassa wassa (yam couscous), we quickly encountered difficulties related to the heating technique, which we didn’t master well at first.”*

Packaging is one challenge faced by almost all agripreneurs involved in processing. A lack of packaging production plants forces agripreneurs to import expensive packaging, often from China. Sonita from Benin, whose company operates in this niche, has made it her mission to help agripreneurs better present their products in order to improve their appeal, particularly to the middle-classes.

Facing the challenge

One solution is to undergo additional training. *“When I launched my business, I needed urgent practical training to come up to speed, so I enrolled at the Songhai Centre in Porto Novo to undergo very specific training,”* explains Grâce-Marlène from Benin.

Other agripreneurs have opted for self-learning through intensive online research, such as Ismaël from Togo and Alphonse from Burkina Faso. Another option is to join professional networks that can provide free training opportunities. For example, in Benin, Danièle is a member of a local union of market gardeners, which has given her access to training.

In order to solve packaging problems, some agripreneurs have launched their own packaging activities in order to reduce costs and diversity – this was the case for Stéphane from Cameroon and Sonita from Benin, who created Fenou Packaging.

8. Poor uptake of products and market access problems

All 24 young entrepreneurs have one thing in common: they are all involved in promoting local products through their agricultural businesses, but convincing consumers to ‘eat local’ is a real challenge. Imported goods are cheaper and better presented, and products from abroad are often perceived to be better quality. However, many local products have a better intrinsic quality, and consumers are not always aware of their virtues or nutritional value.

Agripreneurs therefore face a significant challenge in changing these perceptions. *“Kenyan consumers are not aware of the virtues of gluten-free flour as opposed to imported wheat flour: this is where communication is really important,”* explains Elizabeth from Kenya.

Emmanuel from Côte d’Ivoire has faced similar challenges: *“It can be a real challenge to convince consumers to adopt chocolate, a product that is not well known by the general public, and which is seen as beyond their reach in terms of cost,”* he adds. In Burkina Faso, Claude Arsène has struggled to convey the benefits of natural fertilisers to farmers: *“We see that producers and consumers aren’t aware of the dangers associated with the use of chemicals; what’s more, farmers are often sceptical about natural fertilisers and treatment products, and it takes time to convince them.”*

Entrepreneurs also face various problems in accessing markets. “We often lack the knowledge concerning potential marketing channels for our products,” explains Ollasset from Côte d’Ivoire. Even with the knowledge, the cost of accessing markets can be excessive: “We considered exporting our jams to Europe, but the transport costs are really prohibitive if you don’t have a very large quantity to export,” adds Caroline from Côte d’Ivoire. Emmanuel from Côte d’Ivoire explains that delayed payments from clients can also have a significant impact on the cash flow of a small business: “The fact that supermarkets impose a system of sale on consignment with deferred payment that can go up to 90 days puts us at a disadvantage, especially new businesses like ours that need liquidity quickly.”

Facing the challenge

With poor uptake of products and access to markets such common challenges, the 24 agripreneurs have developed extensive ways of overcoming these issues:

- Make friends and family your first customers. “The first step to convince the market and consumers is to start by convincing the people close to you,” advises Flavien from Cameroon. “The agripreneur has to see their family and close circle of friends as their first clientele. They are the ones best placed to test your product and trust you, and word of mouth will work through them.”
- Find customers before you start producing. Boubacar from Guinea explains: “What you need to have in mind is that you need to sell before you produce. The ideal is to produce according to demand

and orders. The right approach is to carry out market research on what to produce and how to produce it, before you launch into production. But after the market research, you also need to find a way to secure your sales through a contract.”

- Become a processor as well. “One solution in order not to be so dependent on prices imposed by traders on perishable vegetables is for the producer to become a processor,” proposes Grâce-Marlène from Benin.
- Develop partnerships. In order to be able to offer her customers a wide range of vegetable products, Grâce-Marlène has also entered into partnerships with other vegetable farms specialising in agro-ecology.
- Stand up for yourself. “You have to know how to stand up for yourself and not allow supermarkets and mini-markets to walk all over you with their system of sale on consignment,” advises Halatou from Mali. “I would advise all entrepreneurs to demand an advance from their client before confirming any order.”
- Engage in direct sales. “We chose to market our products mainly through direct sales (85%), and we refuse to accept sale on consignment,” reveals Ismaël from Togo. “As a result, we now have about 40 serious sales outlets in Togo.” (See box, Promoting tomatoes through social media and ‘ambassadors’).
- Using social media to promote your product is the best option for new companies. According to Richard from Burkina Faso, “You have to be aware just how important social media is in getting consumers interested in your product. To do so, be eloquent in describing your product in order to inspire people.”



- Take part in fairs or organise specific marketing events. “Since 2016, Sooretul has been organising tasting and sales sessions in companies and institutions to convince middle-class customers of the benefits of using our platform to source quality local products,” explains Awa from Senegal. “During these sessions, we present Sooretul and the products that are available; we give advice on how to prepare certain products, and we offer direct sales. We have developed basket formulas that include an assortment of products from the female processors that we work with, alongside a system of registration and immediate discounts on delivery: it’s a way of promoting the product. We’ve also established another kind of more ‘selective’ event – Sooretul nibbles – where we invite our customers and prospective clients to an after-work meeting, at which a nutrition expert presents the benefits of one of our products – fonio for example – and we have tastings of fonio-based dishes produced by the female processors.”
- With regard to the promotion of natural fertiliser products, agripreneurs have developed a strategy of guided visits to farms, where they explain how the products are used and the impacts that farmers can expect from them; a farmer-to-farmer sponsorship system has also been developed, for example by Samuel from Kenya, who encourages producers to talk to others about their product, in exchange for discounts.

9. Climate change

For a sector that relies so heavily on the weather, the impacts of climate change are a real risk for agripreneurs. Olasset from Côte d’Ivoire reveals

PROMOTING TOMATOES THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA AND ‘AMBASSADORS’

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Tanko Timati has never used radio or television for marketing, only social networks – Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp. We have several marketing strategies: first, we took advantage of a government programme with the national employment agency that provided us with three interns who carried out a communication campaign on the ground. We also have a sponsorship system, through which we offer free products to clients appointed as ‘ambassadors’ whenever they manage to convince another customer to take our products. The peak tomato production period is from August to October, so we offer a promotion during that period when the price of a bottle goes down from 500 CFA francs (€0.75) to 200 CFA francs (€0.30) per unit. As our packaging is in glass bottles, we try to collect returns as much as possible, and direct sales makes this easier; moreover, we provide incentives to our sales representatives to collect empty bottles by rewarding them according to the number of bottles collected and the number of new customers they have gained. Finally, and this is a crucial element, we are really trying to create a community and become a ‘love mark’: so every last Saturday of the month we organise a tomato race with a coach recruited for this purpose. ”

Ismaël, founder of Tanko Timati, Togo





“
As agripreneurs work to make their
businesses a success, the role of their family,
friends, teachers and colleagues is decisive. ”

that in her first year of organic market gardening, drought destroyed almost all of her produce. She came close to giving up but held on, and her aim now is to be able to control her water supply by using drip irrigation, as soon as she is able to access the necessary funds.

10. Poor public policies on entrepreneurship and agriculture

Business policy environments, notably administrative and fiscal frameworks, present a number of challenges for entrepreneurs. In Senegal, Awa says that the environment for the development of start-ups is not very favourable and that services are inadequate. She faced many administrative difficulties in setting up her company, and says she was fortunate to find mentors in an association to help her. During her presentation at the African Youth Forum on Agribusiness, Awa appealed to decision-makers: *“Our solutions must be taken into account in development policies if we want an environment that supports the creation of businesses and start-ups.”*

Public policies on agriculture and agri-food activities likewise leave a lot to be desired in supporting agripreneurs. Whether it is the lack of government support for companies involved in promoting organic agriculture – as Claude Arsène from Burkina Faso highlights – or the lack of opportunities provided by institutional markets for local products, much remains to be done in this area.



PASSING THE BATON...

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Through my activities, young people in the area have more hope and desire, and are more motivated to take the path of entrepreneurship. They understand that it's possible to have dreams, to live them, and many of them are inspired by what I'm achieving on the ground. ”

Boubacar Diallo, Guinea

The 24 young agripreneurs featured in this publication have not only dared to innovate and create wealth in their countries, while transforming the agricultural sector, but they have also become role models, coaches and creators of opportunities for other young people.

Creating jobs for other young people

Activities developed by the 24 agripreneurs have enabled them to employ a number of young people; on average, 89% of all of the jobs they created were filled by people younger than 35. Out of a total of 576 jobs created in 2017, for example, 246 were permanent and 219 of these were given to young people under the age of 35. Of the 330 seasonal jobs created in 2017, 292 were held by young people under 35.

For many of the agripreneurs, job creation was one of the motivations for starting their business. *“The main impact of my company on young people is that it allows the ones who work with me to have a salary at the end of the month and improve their quality of life,”* explains Mohamed from Burkina Faso. Stéphane from Cameroon is also providing an income to young people: *“To date, about 30 young people receive a monthly income from MICAM's activities. They are mainly employees, but also people whose activities depend on the company, like suppliers, distributors, and all the young people involved in the production of packaging.”* In Kenya, Samuel explains



how much of an impact his business is having on the entire community: *“We expect each project to generate €43,500 per year in value in the community through additional jobs and improved agricultural yields. We are creating ten permanent jobs per production unit in each village and giving young people inputs that will make agriculture more profitable for them.”*

A source of inspiration

In addition to providing employment, successful agripreneurs often inspire other young people to follow suit. In Burkina Faso for example, five young people have been inspired by Richard to set up in poultry farming, while 12 young people in Alphonse’s circle have started pig farming. *“I inspire other young people with my strong will to succeed, my determination, my status as a female entrepreneur and my belief in entrepreneurship.”* reveals Odile from Benin. In Mali, Halatou has also inspired many young people who have themselves invested in family businesses or set up their own. Young people often contact her for advice, and she also takes part in many panel discussions to share her experience, especially with young people.

Trainers

Creating a training centre

In Senegal, Souleymane offers paid vocational training courses for young people, with the opportunity of being hired by his company at the end of the course: *“The training centre we have set up is also an opportunity for young people to get training in the field of organic strawberry production, with a credit system for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, refundable against their salary once they are hired,”* he explains.

Ollasset from Côte d’Ivoire has also trained other farmers to adopt environmentally friendly practices: *“My results were enough to convince others to adopt the same approach. In rural areas, it’s what you see that you can copy.”*

Technical or business training

In Benin, Régis organises meetings several times a month for people who have questions about projects or would like feedback: *“I wanted to set up this niche because the demand was growing. The audience is of all ages and from all sectors,”* he says. Ismaël from Togo offers training and experience-sharing to encourage young people to get involved in entrepreneurship; until December 2017 he hosted a set of free public conferences on business management. In Cameroon, Stéphane is also involved in passing on his entrepreneurial skills to other young people. He teaches on the theme of *‘How to start a business without capital or any financial or material support’* in 17 different classes at various higher education institutions across the country.

Dozens of young people are trained each year by Roméo from Côte d’Ivoire on how to create an agricultural business and process agricultural products. *“I train young people with the aim of expanding into all African countries because I need qualified technicians, and there are currently no schools that train for this profession.”* To help him recruit young people, Roméo has developed a partnership with business incubator Incub’Ivoire. As a result, in 2017, he recruited 300 young people with two years of higher education to take part in a six-month training course (two months of theory and four months practical). *“The aim is to train these young people in the manufacture*



of fertilisers, in certification and approval procedures, and in derived products such as substrate and above-ground cuttings. These 300 young people will then have a secure job at Microfertile, and will be able, after a certain time in the company, to set up their own business and become true agricultural entrepreneurs,” Roméo explains.

Remote coaching

From his farm in Guinea, Boubacar provides advice online to young people looking for inspiration:

“I have two types of audience: locals and young people from neighbouring countries, and young people from the diaspora or who have emigrated to Europe,” he explains. *“They all speak of the inspiration my project gives them, expressing the desire to come back to the country and follow my example.”*

Since 2018, Ismaël from Togo has also been using digital technologies to pass on his entrepreneurship experience to other young people by creating a channel on the Telegram app, called Tanko Management, to train young people on the principles of business management. In Benin, Sonita outlines the ways in which she supports young people: *“Through social networks, we advise young people, especially on the different types of packaging that should be used according to the type of product. We also recommend machines and equipment that can facilitate the production and packaging of their products. We also put them in contact with our partner distributors so that they can sell their stocks through a reliable distribution network.”*

In Burkina Faso, Richard uses a combination of face-to-face and remote coaching. *“Currently, at least five young people have set up poultry farms and have taken me as a mentor and coach. These are young people in Burkina Faso and outside the country, and I support them*

in setting up their business by providing advice. For young people within my own community, I have also set up a close-up coaching service, for which I charge. As part of this service, I carry out two supervision trips a month to each young person’s farm. At the beginning, I give them a document that outlines the farm management protocol and I stay in constant contact with them – by phone, WhatsApp or Facebook – in order to advise them.”

Speaking at specialised seminars or in schools

In Côte d’Ivoire, Caroline has already had several opportunities to speak at conferences and share her experience to motivate young people on the subject of entrepreneurship. In January 2018, she was invited by the Forum on Women’s Employment and Entrepreneurship in Côte d’Ivoire to speak on the subject of ‘Dare to make your dreams come true!’

“**In addition to providing employment, successful agripreneurs often inspire other young people to follow suit.**”

Samuel from Kenya also regularly takes part in conferences and speaks to young students to encourage them to go into business. *“From the very start, I have really encouraged young people to follow their dreams by sharing my example,”* he says.

In Côte d’Ivoire, Emmanuel gives lectures to encourage young entrepreneurs or university graduates to go into the agri-food sector. One entrepreneur who created a chocolate brand in Ghana told Emmanuel he had been his inspiration: *“that gives me real satisfaction,”* he says proudly.





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By itself, the motivation of the entrepreneur is not enough. As the business grows, an entrepreneur needs to be able to rely on a committed and responsible team. ”

Getting involved through a specialised association or body

In Burkina Faso, Claude Arsène's company Bioprotect works on behalf of associations by raising awareness about the harmful consequences of the use of chemical pesticides, training producers on the use of organic inputs, and working on agricultural entrepreneurship for young people.

In Senegal, Awa is the president of Yeesal Agrihub, the first AgriTech hub in the country. The hub was created by a group of young people passionate about agriculture, in order to create a space for exchange, sharing and stimulating the creation of innovative projects in the sectors of agriculture and ICT. The aim is to create multidisciplinary groups to enable young students, farmers and entrepreneurs to find innovative ICT solutions together, in order to face the recurring challenges of the rural world.

Taking on young people as interns or volunteers

In Benin, Danièle regularly welcomes interns to her company in order to “*share her passion with others*”. Grâce-Marlène from Benin has also set up a partnership with the Songhai Centre in Porto Novo to host interns on her farm, with 15 joining her in 2017. Going forwards, she wants to reach out to technical or agricultural high schools to offer this kind of work experience. In Burkina Faso, one of the entrepreneurs sometimes takes on interns, mainly students, with one recently writing their dissertation on solar incubators.



ANNEX

About Agribusiness TV

Agribusiness TV is a unique web TV website which aims to use video as a tool to promote and enhance the agricultural sector in the eyes of young people by showing the successful careers of young agricultural entrepreneurs and their innovations in Africa.

The site is the very first web TV in Africa dedicated to young people who innovate and succeed in the agricultural world.

A showcase for young people's success in agricultural entrepreneurship

With its slogan that 'Seeing is believing', Agribusiness TV encourages young people to get involved in agriculture, by highlighting the careers of successful young agricultural entrepreneurs. Each video, which is available in English and French, follows the journey of a young entrepreneur involved in different segments of the agricultural value chain, including crop or animal production, processing, marketing, technologies and services, green jobs, etc.

A channel designed for mobile viewing

Given that its main target audience is young people, who are ever more connected to the internet through their phones, Agribusiness TV has been designed specifically for mobile viewing. The videos are available via mobile applications that can be downloaded for free, or they can be shared via

Bluetooth where internet connections are poor.

In addition, since young Africans are very active on social media, Agribusiness TV also has a Facebook page, a Twitter account, a LinkedIn page and an Instagram account. Facebook statistics show that 80% of page visitors connect via mobile phone.

An ever-growing audience

Agribusiness TV has produced more than 100 videos, which have been viewed more than 7 million times. Agribusiness TV's Facebook page has more than 168,000 likes and its YouTube channel and Twitter account each have more than 10,000 followers.

Find out more

<http://agribusinesstv.info/en/>



The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) is a joint international institution of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States and the European Union (EU). CTA operates under the framework of the Cotonou Agreement and is funded by the EU.

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