

Involving youths in agriculture offers sure path to sustainable development



Participants at the youth workshop in a group photo

In a keynote address, Dr Namanga Ngongi, IITA Board member said tapping into the entrepreneurial spirit of Africa’s young men and women was a sure way to move the development agenda of Africa forward in a sustainable manner.

Dr Ngongi spoke at the just concluded workshop on Engagement of Youth Entrepreneurship for Agricultural Transformation in Africa held from 28 to 30 May at IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Painting a picture of the current situation in Africa, Dr Ngongi noted that in spite of the natural resources that favor agricultural production, the continent’s 25 percent population still goes to bed hungry and that malnutrition was still widespread despite continental efforts to change Africa’s agricultural narrative.

He proposed the adoption of a transformative agenda, one that would convert African agriculture into a vibrant and economically viable and sustainable business sector that is attractive to the youth.

For this to happen, Dr Ngongi said appropriate



Dr Ngongi

tools and machines that would ease the tedium of agricultural work and make the sector attractive to youths and less exacting on women were desperately needed.

According to him, it is not enough to make pious declarations that accord priority to agriculture.

“The declarations should be backed by concrete policies and programs that will lead to transformation of the sector at scale,” he said.

The IITA BoT member said African agriculture needed a new group of actors, persons who see opportunities and take action including risks, to turn opportunities into profitable ventures.

“These are the entrepreneurs and in the agriculture sector, agro-entrepreneurs. This group of actors, young for the most part, will be needed to provide services to the agriculture sector throughout the value chain, from the provision of improved seeds and other planting materials to land preparation; from planting to harvesting; from storage to processing and transformation of raw agricultural commodities to finished food and industrial products,” he explained.

He noted that though the agro-entrepreneurs do have the interest and the will to take risks, most often they lack the business skills to manage an enterprise profitably.

“They do not normally have the opportunity to test a business idea before taking it to the market place as few countries have any functioning start-up or risk sharing programs. Young people in particular are disadvantaged as they do not have access to even a minimum of capital,” he stressed.

Dr Chiji Ojukwu, Director, Agriculture

and Agro-Industry Department, African Development Bank reechoed that exploiting opportunities to enlist and hold the interest of the African youth and women in agriculture was crucial if African countries were to meet the growth and poverty reduction targets under the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

He said the Bank was pleased with the successful multiplication and dissemination of improved crop varieties by the IITA Agripreneurs under the SARD-SC project.

Dr Ojukwu shared the Bank’s experience which showed that youths were willing to go for modern agriculture and agribusiness that are supported with the necessary services including science and technology, finance, and real time market information among others.

Finally, he reiterated the Bank’s commitment to supporting agriculture with the view to achieving inclusive growth in the continent.



Dr Ojukwu

Nigeria joins forces with IITA to fight youth unemployment

...commits US\$500,000



Dr Adesina speaks at the youth workshop

Nigeria is supporting the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) Youth Agripreneur program with a commitment of US\$500,000 as part of efforts to tackle unemployment through the engagement of youth in agriculture.

The funds will go into training and capacity building of youth and will create the next generation of young farmers in the country.

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Dr Akinwumi Adesina, declared Nigeria's commitment at the just concluded workshop on *Engagement of Youth Entrepreneurship for Agricultural Transformation in Africa* held from 28 to 30 May at IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Initiated two years ago, the IITA Youth Agripreneur program builds the capacity of youth and exposes them to the numerous untapped opportunities in agriculture and, more importantly, changes the negative perception that young men and women hold when it comes to agriculture. The program has currently engaged 31 Nigerian youths from different backgrounds with the possibility of expanding in the years ahead.

Dr Adesina gave kudos to IITA for developing the program, and the milestones recorded by the youth so far in cultivation and dissemination of improved planting materials. He noted that the program was in line with the Nigerian Government's transformation agenda which is also creating job opportunities for youths.

IITA Director General, Dr Nteranya Sanginga commended Nigeria for supporting the initiative and described youth unemployment in Africa as "a time bomb" if authorities failed to act quickly to harness their potential.

Like many other countries, Nigeria is

facing serious unemployment challenges as a result of the increase in population; and the growing number of students/ candidates into tertiary institutions over the years that results in more graduates than available jobs further complicates the situation. The state of affairs is a serious challenge for every successive government that has ruled the nation since 1990 with unemployment rising to 24 percent in 2011.

Nigeria's government alone cannot provide the needed jobs. However, agriculture is seen as a key sector that could help absorb the increasing number of youths in the labor market.

Researchers say to get the youths involved in agriculture, agriculture itself must be attractive.

Dr Bashir Jama, Director of Soil Health Program with the Alliance for a Green

Revolution in Africa (AGRA) said to make agriculture attractive would involve narrowing yield gaps and adoption of improved technologies to increase agricultural productivity.

"Equally important is the need to diversify production systems that minimize risks and generate attractive incomes, enhancement and integration of livestock and nutrients recycling, and reduction of postharvest losses," he explained.

The *Engagement of Youth Entrepreneurship for Agricultural Transformation in Africa* workshop which was organized by IITA was supported by the African Development Bank (AfDB) under the Support for Agricultural Research and Development of Strategic Crops (SARD-SC) project, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and AGRA.



Dr Adesina with IITA Agripreneurs

African countries back IITA Youth Agripreneur initiative to end unemployment



Dr Chrys Akem (insert) reading the communiqué

About 20 African countries have thrown their weight behind the IITA Youth Agripreneur (IYA) initiative—a pilot scheme that is engaging youths in agriculture with clear signals of ending youth unemployment in the continent. The initiative has also been endorsed by the IITA Board of Trustees, according to Dr Namanga Ngongi, IITA Board member.

IYA changes the mindset of young people towards agriculture and equips them with various opportunities in the production and marketing of agricultural products, cutting across value chains such as cassava, banana/plantain, soybean, maize, vegetables, livestock, and fish production.

The countries supported the IYA initiative in a communiqué at the end of a conceptualization workshop on Engagement of Youth Entrepreneurship for Agricultural Transformation in Africa that was held at IITA in Ibadan, Nigeria, from 28 to 30 May 2014.

About 200 participants reviewed the current unemployment situation in the continent,

and noted that youth unemployment and underemployment are high, with over 70% of the population between 15 and 24 years in many countries under-/unemployed, if not outright unemployed.

The countries noted that the present situation threatens not only food security but also the national security of all African countries, and may compromise the attainment of the targets set under the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

- Recognizing that agriculture can drive development and has the potential to create millions of decent jobs for Africa's male and female youth in the provision of products and services such as seed and input supply, crop aggregation and marketing, postharvest handling, processing and storage, and other value-addition activities.
- Recognizing that the youth population in Africa could play a pivotal role in the dissemination of improved technologies

and innovations to farmers which have the capacity of closing yield gaps and enhancing productivity in the continent.

- Recognizing that the youth can advance agribusiness development in Africa with adequate support services, the countries with development partners proposed a multinational youth-in-agriculture/agribusiness program drawing on the IITA Youth Agripreneur model and other proven models that would focus on youth empowerment in agribusinesses and related enterprises across Africa.

The proposal has, in principle, been endorsed by donors, led by the African Development Bank.

The countries commended the African Development Bank, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa for supporting agricultural development initiatives in Africa, and IITA for hosting the conception workshop.

IITA partners with the WJ Series to promote agriculture

IITA and the Winihin Jemide Series are partnering through a Garden Show exhibition on the theme "Waste to wonderful" in celebration of Nigeria at 100, to promote environmental beautification, healthy living, and agriculture.

The 3-day exhibition which was held at the Oriental Hotel in Lagos from 30 May to 1 June showcased an overwhelming yet spectacular display of flowers and the benefits that agriculture offers. The CEO of the WJ Series Mrs Winihin Jemide, speaking at the opening was very delighted and welcomed all to the second

edition of the series. She encouraged all to at least plant a tree and join forces to transform wasted areas in Nigeria to green areas.

"Planting is a rare way to share" she said. This year's exhibitions featured contests in photography, essay writing, and flower displays. Guests came from all around the world.



Guests at IITA's booth

IITA and NARES to strengthen ties



NARES partners at IITA Business Incubation Platform

IITA and director generals/representatives of national agricultural research and extension systems (NARES) in Africa held a meeting in Ibadan to seek ways to strengthen partnerships.

The meeting was held after the “Conceptualization Workshop on Engagement of Youth Entrepreneurship

for Agricultural Transformation in Africa” in IITA Ibadan.

Eleven DGs or their representatives from 11 African countries attended the meeting.

The main objective of the meeting was to review IITA’s relationship with NARES partners and to find ways of strengthening and improving collaboration with a view

to achieving more impact at the farm level through rapid dissemination and adoption of research innovations.

NARES partners recognized the contribution and support of IITA to the NARES systems over the years in terms of capacity building, development of scientific innovations, and improvement of rural livelihoods in Africa. However, they observed that this support declined at a point as a result of dwindling funds from CGIAR. To address these issues and foster stronger partnerships in the future, the NARES partners proposed recommendations that both IITA and they would work on to foster better relations.

They proposed that a meeting of an enlarged group of NARES DGs be held next year.

The meeting which was initiated by the Partnerships and Capacity Development Directorate under the leadership of Dr Kenton Dashiell had a mix of facilitation and short presentations, offering participants a conducive atmosphere to freely air their concerns and voice their opinions. Dr Alfred Dixon gave the opening remarks and a presentation on the objectives of the meeting. Mr Zoumana Bamba chaired the first session while Dr Victor Manyong chaired the second session. Mrs Hilde Koper gave a short presentation on Intellectual Property while Godwin Atser moderated the session.

Photo speak at youth workshop



Dr Adesina receives plaque



Dr Adesina and other VIPs at IITA Business Incubation Platform



Dr Ojukwu (AfDB) with his plaque



Dr Jacob Mignouna (BMGF)



Dr Jama (AGRA)



L-R: Drs Ranjana and Kristina (IITA)