

## Going for the prize: young farmers demonstrate their preparedness for the world of agribusiness



A young farmer presents his business case before other youth contesting for the AfDB fund for youth agripreneurship.

The inaugural African Youth Agripreneur Forum (AYAF) supported by the African Development Bank (AfDB) to demonstrate the success of agribusinesses in job and wealth creation in Africa is about to break a new dawn for innovative young people who are ready to change the way agricultural enterprises are run in Africa.

The Bank, in partnership with IITA, Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), Africa Agribusiness Incubation Network (AAIN), and Africa 2.0, successfully trained and hosted an AgriPitch Competition in Ibadan on 25-26 April, where over 250 African youth actively involved in agribusiness participated. Twenty of them competed to be among the final three Agripreneurs to be sponsored to India next month to present their business plans before the AfDB Board, and receive grants to roll out their businesses.

The Brazil-Africa Institute in collaboration with IITA and AfDB will also sponsor 30 youth to be trained in Brazil this year.

The contestants presented their plans in the areas of information and communication technology (ICT),

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## Partnerships for perpetuity: N2Africa consolidates PPPs as plans for exit strategy progresses

Among agricultural researchers, there exists a growing consensus that developing excellent technologies for farmers to grow their enterprises is no longer enough. What needs to be done for such technologies to remain effective and sustainable beyond the life of any intervention program? This is the question the N2Africa project is trying to answer in its wider efforts to put nitrogen fixation to work on the fields of groundnut, soybean, and cowpea farmers in Africa.

During its third annual review and planning meeting on 25-27 April held in Abuja, over 40 partners comprising IITA



Group photograph of meeting participants in Abuja.

scientists, as well as representatives from various NGOs, public and private sector companies underpinned active involvement with both public and private partners as a vital option in ensuring that N2Africa technologies stay relevant beyond 2018 when the project ends. The partners also reported key achievements and challenges from the past year and developed work plans for 2017.

Overall, the project goal is to reach 140,000 legume farmers in Nigeria with best bet agronomic practices and inputs especially NoduMax—an IITA invented biofertilizer (inoculant) that promotes nitrogen fixation in the soil and is proven to maximize legume yields when used in combination with phosphorus-based fertilizers. The project also aims to provide job opportunities for at least 2,000 youth in Borno State, Nigeria through agro-based enterprises.

But more than the numbers, Fred Kanampiu, N2Africa Project Coordinator, stressed that the project's greater target is to ensure the sustainability of the practices deployed to beneficiaries through the project.

"Our impact is not just centered on reaching so many people, but on making

sure that the packages we sell to them during the life of this project empowers and improves farmers' livelihoods so that these people continue to use these technologies even after the life of this project. We are more driven to leave a worthy legacy as we prepare to exit," he said.

In its first phase, from 2009 to 2013, the project had promoted research activities in relation to legume agronomy, cropping system design, and rhizobiology. Now in its second phase, it has established long-term public-private partnerships (PPPs) with legume value chain actors. N2Africa is actively working with its dissemination partners to create an unobstructed retail channel for inoculants and seeds as well as for information and production technologies. It is also dedicated to link scientific knowledge with capacity building especially among women and the youth.

"N2Africa is empowering 13 MSc and 5 PhD students in Nigeria to continue work on inoculants and for women's groups through various capacity building initiatives to be able to produce and market the legumes they cultivate," said Kamai Nkeki, coordinator, N2Africa-Nigeria.

Another approach being explored by

N2Africa is working with the Federal Government of Nigeria through its new Anchor Borrowers Program (ABP) to increase the chances of its beneficiaries to access credit and other inputs.

Explaining why the project is keying into this initiative, Innocent Okuku, CEO, Intrio Synergy Limited and N2Africa partner, said the move was necessary to help smallholder farmers overcome the bottlenecks limiting them from getting available agricultural technological packages.

"Many smallholder farmers still don't get optimum yields and income from their production because they are poor. They are unable to afford the cost of improved seeds and other production inputs which they need even though these are readily available. In 2017, N2Africa will bridge that gap and help its farmers to reach the benchmark set by the government so that they can get all the benefits from the program," Okuku said.

N2Africa phase 2 is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation by a grant to Wageningen University & Research which leads the project together with IITA, ILRI, University of Zimbabwe and many other partners in Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, DR Congo, Rwanda,

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production, harvesting and processing, marketing, logistics, research, and financial services.

The best three business pitches selected were those of [Mary Joseph](#), [Ababio Kwame](#), and [Mahmud Johnson](#). All 20 contestants received awards and certificates.

Speaking at the conference, [Nteranya Sanginga](#), IITA Director General, said he was motivated to pioneer the youth-in-agribusiness scheme in Africa—IITA Youth Agripreneurs (IYA)—because of his firm belief that the African youth have the capacity and so many opportunities to turn around unemployment and poverty. He therefore challenged the young Agripreneurs to take control of their future.

"Take charge of the future. Agriculture is the future for youth employment; it is the future of Africa. IITA will support initiatives to ensure that young people on this continent contribute to the

transformation of African agriculture, through agribusiness and its value chain," he said.

In his keynote address, Chiji Ojukwu, AfDB Director, praised the outputs from IYA. He also assured the young farmers of the Bank's continuous support for agriculture in Africa.

"IITA is already a renowned center of excellence for breeding new plant varieties for tropical Africa, but now, it is becoming a center for nurturing the next agri-millionaires! The African Development Bank is committed to play its part and has already pledged to increase its annual agriculture lending to at least US\$2.4 billion per annum for the next 10 years," Ojukwu stated.

AYAF serves as a platform for aggregating agripreneurs across Africa, and intensifying the impact of their activities on agriculture and development in the continent. It also aims to link

them to business and development organizations, and with markets within and outside Africa as potential off-takers.

"I am my own boss. This training has made me better, I have linked with other active youth in various value chains who will in some way make my business flourish more," Noel Mulinganya, an IYA, said.

Another participant, Temitope Aroge, a medical doctor-cum-famer, also believes her involvement in agriculture is a motivation to rural farmers.

"I am full of joy working with the rural farmers. They get encouraged seeing me in the field doing the same thing as them. I am a fulfilled farmer," Aroge said.

AYAF will eventually become a flagship element of the [ENABLE Youth Program](#) which highlights the key features and success stories as well as impact of AfDB's investments across Africa for

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# Nigeria's Minister of Agriculture urges youth to prop agriculture

Chief Audu Ogbeh, Nigeria's Honorable Minister of Agriculture (HMA), has urged the [IITA Youth Agripreneurs](#) in the IITA-Onne station to produce large volumes of improved suckers, pledging government's commitment to procure the inputs.



Chief Audu Ogbeh (seated, fourth from left), with top executives from the Ministry of Agriculture, pose for a group photo with IITA staff, agripreneurs, and scientists at Onne.

He said he was counting on IITA to provide improved suckers of banana and plantain, which government will distribute to youth farmers all over Nigeria, to boost the production of dessert banana in the country.

"This country produces the tastiest bananas I have ever eaten; we have the best! However, we don't grow them well; thus, we are not in the international market. I am happy to see that IITA is setting up a youth training facility and tissue culture laboratory here. The Government will support the Institute with equipment useful in producing plantain and banana, so the Ministry will buy whatever quantity of suckers IITA produces," Chief Ogbeh said.

Addressing IYA, Chief Ogbeh said the agricultural sector was vital in eradicating unemployment and praised the Institute

for empowering young men and women with agricultural skills to sustain themselves and the country at large.

The Honorable Minister spoke at the IITA-Onne station on 26 April, when he visited to inspect the youth training center and research facilities there. He was accompanied by an entourage from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development including Heneiken Lokpobiri, the Honorable Minister of State for Agriculture; Onimim Jacks, Rivers state Commissioner of Agriculture; Week Agbapou Doodei, Commissioner of Agriculture, Bayelsa State as well as directors from the Federal and State ministries of agriculture.

"The skills you have acquired should be passed on to other youth especially in this locality so that Nigerian agriculture can overtake and have a comparative

advantage in the world market. The future of Nigerian agriculture is here and it is in your hands. The country depends on the youth because if you cannot feed yourselves then there's no future. It is a serious responsibility you have," he said.

[Richardson Okechukwu](#), Head of station, IITA in Onne, welcomed the dignitaries and expressed IITA's gratitude to the Nigerian government for its strong support to IITA through the ATASP-1 Outreach and Cassava Transformation Agenda programs which have helped to bring back the station into a functional state.

"IITA Onne has recorded award-winning research in plantain and banana and is the best benchmark site in Africa. The station has been reopened to serve Nigeria better especially the South-East and South-South geo-political zones. It will also serve as a center for youth empowerment and training," Okechukwu said.

Chief Ogbeh had previously visited IITA-Onne in 2002 when he launched actions that proved effective in forestalling the imminent threat of Cassava Mosaic Disease in West Africa. The effort revolutionized cassava production and its value chains in Africa and facilitated the release of new improved cassava varieties.

Chief Ogbeh was delighted to be in IITA Onne station for the second time since its inception. He also enjoined the Institute to stay very close to the Ministry of Agriculture and the government.

"We are aware that the station was closed down and are happy it is functional again... We can work together to ensure that this center and other youth centers are developed. As you expand, keep us informed. When you have new varieties, let us know, there are markets all around," he concluded.



Chief Ogbeh chatting with the agripreneurs (left), and inspecting the products from the farm of young farmers (right).

## AgResults holds 4th annual implementer induction and training at IITA

Aflatoxin contamination is a menace affecting over 4.5 billion people in developing countries. This is why the AgResults aflasafe™ pilot project is working through its private-sector experts known as implementers to facilitate access for farmers to Aflasafe—Africa's first biocontrol product for aflatoxins. Implementers facilitate the adoption of aflasafe™ and work with smallholder farmers to increase the productivity and profitability of their aflasafe-treated maize.

For the last four years, the AgResults project has successfully demonstrated that private sector involvement in innovation delivery can greatly influence the ways farmers are reached with available technologies, thereby making it easier for resource-poor farmers to benefit from and have access to the technology and knowledge needed for their production.

On 19-21 April, implementers gathered for the fourth annual induction and training program of the project in Ibadan. The exercise brought together 24 old and 14 new implementers and many other agricultural enterprises producing maize or actively involved in the value chain. The forum created an atmosphere for participants to gain skills required in modern agricultural practices through agribusiness and knowledge on the best approach in preventing aflatoxin to enhance food security and safety.

"Farmers want to harvest crops and ensure good health for themselves and their families; they want to earn income to help their families. This training will greatly empower implementers and farmers



Debo Akande, Aflasafe AgResults Pilot Manager addressing implementers in Ibadan.

to improve their economic returns and production," said Kenton Dashiell, Deputy Director General, Partnerships for Delivery, in his opening remarks.

Joseph Asenge, Executive Chairman, Association of aflatoxin free agro products producers of Nigeria (AAFPPON), an old implementer, said, "The training is really impactful and educative. My yields have increased greatly. There is high demand for my maize seeds. I have a 20% increase in my income. My business has expanded. Being an implementer has given me a better livelihood. Now I have acquired two large farms because of this project."

Also speaking at the opening ceremony, the Special Adviser to the Oyo state Government on Agriculture, Adekunle Olusegun, stated, "We are all under threat because we consume maize with

microbial constituents. We need aflasafe-treated maize to minimize our exposure to *Aspergillus* attack."

Another participant, Abiodun Okunola, from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), said he was taking home vital points that will help the CBN provide advisory services to farmers, State Government, and agro-allied companies.

AgResults is a multi-donor, multilateral initiative providing incentives and rewarding high-impact agricultural innovation that promotes global food security, health, and nutrition through the design and implementation of pull mechanism pilots. It is funded by the governments of [Australia](#), [Canada](#), the [United Kingdom](#), and the [United States](#), in partnership with the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), through a Financial Intermediary Fund operated by the [World Bank](#).

## Nigeria Youth Parliament visit IITA

On 20 April, Rt. Hon Ayodele Obe, the newly elected Speaker of the Nigerian youth parliament (NYP) led youth delegates from Ondo, Katsina, Imo, Oyo, Kwara, Lagos, and Ogun states to IITA-Ibadan to kick-start collaboration with the IITA Youth Agripreneurs (IYA). The Youth Parliament was instituted in 2008 as a forum for empowering young people to fully realize their potentials and create a fair chance for them to compete favorably with the youth of other democratic nations. NYP is looking to work with the government to replicate the IYA model in every Nigerian state.



DDG Kenton Dashiell welcomes and addresses the youth delegates.

## Announcements

- **STMA Regional Planning Meeting**, 30 April – 4 May IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria
- **Research Support Day**, 3 May, IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria
- **IITA-Mozambique inauguration + IITA@50 local celebration**, 8 May, Nampula, Mozambique
- **IITA Board Meeting**, 9–12 May, Nampula, Mozambique
- **SARD-SC Maize Conference**, Livingstone, 14–20 May, Zambia
- **Africa RISING Science Advisory Group Meeting**, 22–23 June 2017, Arusha, Tanzania