OYA virtual side-event

Accelerating Job Creation and Youth Entrepreneurship in Agriculture and Agribusiness Through Innovative Solutions and Digitalisation

September 28th, 2022
11:00 - 12:30 GMT
The Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) is a Government of Japan initiative established since 1993, and co-hosted by the United Nations, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank and African Union Commission (AUC). TICAD is a policy forum where diverse stakeholders participate in and share their expertise on African development.

The eighth instalment of the Conference (TICAD 8) was hosted by the Republic of Tunisia from 27th to 28th August 2022. However, the side events occurred virtually due to the situation regarding COVID-19. The official side events provided an opportunity to exchange opinions related to African development.

Launched at TICAD7 in August 2019 in six countries (Ghana, Tunisia, Cabo Verde, DRC, Kenya, Zambia), the Opportunities for Youth in Africa (OYA) programme has registered strong success stories of youth in agriculture and agribusiness obtaining training and skills to enhance their employability and entrepreneurship prospects in agriculture and agribusiness. The OYA programme therefore aimed to leverage TICAD8 as a platform to share best practices, raise awareness of persistent issues faced by youth in Africa and offer tailored innovative solutions while inspiring partnership building. This was be achieved via an engaging dialogue with the country government representatives of OYA’s partner countries, present and future public and private sector partners as well as beneficiaries of the OYA programme.

The OYA side event was titled “Opportunities for Youth in Africa (OYA): Accelerating Job Creation and Youth Entrepreneurship in Agriculture and Agribusiness through Innovative Solutions and Digitalisation.”

Technology and innovation offer an important mechanism to transform youth’s perception of the agricultural sector into an attractive source of job opportunities and thus incentivise youth to be involved in agrifood systems. At the same time, innovation in agrifood systems i.e., solving old problems in new ways, addressing new problems with proven solutions, or bringing new solutions to new problems, is critical for the transformation of the food and agricultural sector. Embedded in this transformation is innovation’s ability to enhance the agrifood sector’s capacity to drive economic productivity and create decent jobs. Furthermore, through innovation and digitalisation, our global food systems will be better positioned to adapt and respond to climate change with attendant positive impacts on food security, income levels, and employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for African youth.

This TICAD8 Side Event explored how innovation and digitalisation can contribute to the expansion of the success stories registered under the OYA programme and contribute to the development of more sustainable, resilient, and productive agrifood systems in Africa.
Dr. Janet Edeme
Head, Rural Development Division, Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment, AUC

Mr. Mulunga J. Shimbela
Director, Department of Planning and Information, Ministry of Technology and Science in Zambia

Ms. Mouna Lyoubi
Youth Employment Expert, Regional coordinator, “Opportunities for Youth in Africa” (OYA) programme, UNIDO

Dr. Nomathemba Mhlanga
Agribusiness Officer & Regional Office for Africa Programme Manager - Decent Employment in Agrifood Systems, FAO

Ms. Afia Bobia Amanfo
Entrepreneurship & Innovation Manager, Bridge for Billions

Ms. Mara Zhanet Michelo
CEO, Jacaranda Hub

Dr. Faten Hamdi
CEO, ControlMed, Tunisia

The side event has gathered 199 registered participants across African continent and beyond.
Innovation and digitalisation can contribute to making agriculture attractive to youth. In a young continent, where agriculture plays a key role in the economy, it is indeed key to engage youth in this sector.

Developing partnerships with all actors: national authorities, international organization, the private sector, and the youth will help create a better enabling environment for youth.

Partnership with the private sector will strengthen youth access to new technologies, and foster innovation.

Digital platforms can be developed to facilitate networking and youth engagement.

Investment guidelines for youth, such as the AUC-FAO 'Investments Guidelines for Youth in Agrifood Systems in Africa' should be popularized as they provide practical guidance on the design of investment programmes and interventions that focus on promotion of youth.

Youth is an heterogeneous group for which tailored-made solutions should be built.

We should build on the youth to reach the youth. In this sense, youth champions can help extend the impact of activities or programmes.

Youth are motivated. They know what they want and programmes should respond to their needs.
The Agriculture and Agri-business sector occupies a central role in Africa’s development and represents an opportunity for youth who are the engine of the continent’s growth. There is a need for a concerted effort between public institutions and private sector on creating an enabling environment for youth participation in this sector.

- How is the Government of Zambia creating this enabling environment for youth in agriculture?
- How can international development partners support this dynamic?

- African economies grow from an agrarian background. Agriculture hence has a critical role to play in development.
- The Government of Zambia recognizes that technologies are a catalyst for national development given their cross-cutting effects on all aspects of the economy.
- The potential of technologies is exacerbated by Zambia’s demographic profile, where around 65% of the population is below the age of 35.
- The Ministry of Technology and Science, and the Government of Zambia aims at fostering technologies and innovations, especially by young people, to position Zambia as a bread basket not only for Southern Africa but for the continent at large.
- It is critical to engage youth. As such, the Government implements digital transformation strategies, specifically targeting young people so as to leverage on technological advancements to develop a more productive, sustainable and effective agriculture sector leading to value creation.
- Ensuring a successful digital transformation and engaging youth in developing innovative solutions could unleash the agriculture potential in terms of contribution to national growth, leading to improve livelihood for Zambia’s population.

What can young African people do to ensure that they are well skilled for what the future of work brings, in the context of available agriculture/agribusiness training offered in the continent? How is your ministry organizing these kind of trainings?

- We need to change youth mindset who tend to see agriculture as an old-fashioned sector. Innovation and technology can make agriculture attractive to youth. Indeed,encouraging youth to develop innovative agriculture solutions will help promote decent employment and income-generating activities that create wealth and opportunities for youth.
- We need to create an enabling environment to attract young people into the sector. Thus, technologies/innovation/startups funds can facilitate youth access to financing.
- Technological research & development is also key. Zambia is for instance deploying a satellite for data aggregation and weather forecasting, which will equip youth with the necessary tools to increase their business productivity.
- Moreover, developing partnerships can help facilitate market access. Zambia recently signed an agreement with People’s Republic of China to ease youth access to a larger market for their crop production.
- In this sense, the African Continental Free-Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) also aims at removing trade barriers between African countries and creating a larger continental market.
- Lastly, Zambia is hosting African Innovation Week in November. Such events can strengthen information exchange and collaboration between countries in the continent.
The Agriculture and Agri-business sector occupies a central role in Africa’s development and represents an opportunity for youth who are the engine of the continent’s growth. There is a need for a concerted effort between public institutions and private sector on creating an enabling environment for youth participation in this sector. How can international development partners like FAO support this dynamic?

- **Agriculture is a key sector** in the economy, especially in Africa where it is a source of livelihood for a majority of the population.

- Africa being a very young continent, it is critical to engage youth in agriculture. Youth are key partners to achieve FAO’s mandate: fight and end hunger around the world.

- The agribusiness sector is expected to grow to 1 trillion dollars, as such it can offer youth both employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, especially if innovation is encouraged as a way to create value addition and in the context of a continent facing major (youth) unemployment challenges.

- In this regard, FAO has developed a range of programmes, in collaboration with Member States, to create an enabling environment for youth.

- For instance, a framework for agriculture mechanization in Africa was developed, encouraging the use of improved technologies and ICT in agriculture. Adopted at AUC level, the framework is being implemented at country level.

- Another key aspect to engage youth in smart agriculture is developing the necessary skills and competencies. FAO has developed different trainings tailored for youth, such as the "Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools" (JFFLS) which engage youth in rural areas in learning by doing on the field or online courses on how to start and manage a successful agribusiness.

- Youth should also have a strong voice in policy dialogues. With the Integrated Country Approach (ICA), different Ministries work on how to most effectively create an enabling environment for youth engagement with a view to create on- and off-farm employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

- Moreover, it is important to facilitate youth access to finance. One activity of the OYA programme for instance was to develop a capacity-building workshop in collaboration with financial institutions. This helped youth get familiar with current financial offers while making sure financial institutions understand the needs of the youth to propose tailored financial products.

- More efforts should also be made in recognizing the youth that are doing well in agriculture and sharing success stories to inspire other aspiring young entrepreneurs.

- Furthermore, adopting a value chain approach will foster youth engagement. Indeed, analysing value chains helps identify nodes where youth face constraints so as to work with all actors, government, private sector and youth, to unblock those constraints.
The Agriculture and Agri-business sector occupy a central role in Africa’s development and represent an opportunity for youth who are the engine of the continent’s growth. There is a need for a concerted effort between public institutions and private sector on creating an enabling environment for youth participation in this sector. How can international development partners like UNIDO support this dynamic?

- Meaningfully engaging young people, including through employment and entrepreneurship lies at the core of UNIDO’s mandate.
- The best way to do this is engage all actors involved, private and public sectors.
- We have been working closely with governments to encourage the mainstreaming of youth as part of national priorities and reinforcing the participation of the private sector in ongoing national dialogues on how to translate those decisions into a healthy and sustainable economic environment for youth to be involved in.
- In just one of many examples, UNIDO is working closely with our FAO and AUC colleagues on a joint programme entitled Opportunities for Youth in Africa (OYA) to accelerate job creation in agriculture and agribusiness.
- Since 2020, the OYA programme has partnered with national institutions and private organisations to incubate 271 youth-led agribusinesses (30% of which are women). Indeed, partnering with local institutions and the private sector was critical to ensure beneficiaries received tailored training that reflects the national context they intend to build their business in.
- Furthermore, OYA contributed to removing market access barriers by encouraging an online market presence through the training of 26 agribusinesses and partners, conducting a market research tour of 233 organizations and creating an OYA Business Club platform which connects 44 young entrepreneurs to 6,000+ business and corporates worldwide.
- Facilitating access to finance for youth is also a key aspect of our work. As a result of one our activities in Ghana, ten (10) small businesses that benefited from the OYA acceleration programme in Ghana have raised investments from the private sector in tune of €250,000 from MasterCard Foundation and Cargill.
- We are intent on actively contributing to global fora and providing thematic leadership on youth, working with sister UN agencies, national counterparts, private sector and most importantly, youth themselves. During the past 2 years, we have organized several global events which included public and private sector representatives to discuss pressing matters.
- To conclude, we, as UNIDO, see young people as our partners and often sources of innovation and inspiration for our projects.
- It is undoubtedly clear, that involving young people now is key to addressing the most pressing challenges as we owe it to them to provide them with a platform and opportunities to become meaningful agents of change.
Bridge for Billions supports many entrepreneurs across Africa, giving entrepreneurs in the agribusiness/agritech sector the initial support they need for their great ideas to become self-sustaining realities. Share with us more about Bridge for Billions and your success stories in terms of:

- Integrating technology and innovation in supporting youth entrepreneurs in the agriculture and agribusiness sectors.
- An example of a youth-led agribusiness you have supported that is doing really well in the area of innovation and digitalisation.

- Bridge for Billions is convinced that **young entrepreneurs can strongly contribute to tackling economic challenges** while participating in economic growth.
- In developing countries, **7 out of 10 jobs are created by SMEs**. It is hence critical to support SMEs creation and accompany them to unleash their full potential in terms of job creation.
- In this sense, Bridge for Billions created a series of entrepreneurship programmes to **help young startups strengthen every aspect of their business** to survive in the long term and in turn create jobs for others.
- **Collaboration** is one of our key pillars. Bridge for Billions collaborates with UNIDO and FAO through the OYA programme to develop the OYA IDEA App. Another pillar is our strong **commitment** to ensure each entrepreneur receives tailored-made quality support.
- As such, we created entrepreneurship platforms to allow entrepreneurs to **work step by step while being guided by a personal mentor**. So far, we brought our support to around 3000 entrepreneurs from 124 countries.
- One of our main initiatives in Africa is developed in partnership with UNIDO. OYA IDEA App is an online platform based on Bridge for Billion technologies to support young entrepreneurs in Africa by running a series of online incubation programmes. **IDEA App has already supported 300 young agripreneurs throughout the continent.**
- Our methodology is strongly anchored at the local and national levels to **strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem**. In collaboration with local organizations, we identify high potential sectors in the country, where we can support entrepreneurs to innovate and create businesses.
- Innovation is at the core of our mandate. OYA IDEA App focuses on innovation-based entrepreneurship. **Innovative solutions can be brought at all levels of agribusiness:** from farming, to processing or digital marketing to access physical and virtual markets. There are many ways to apply youth creativity in the agriculture sector.
- One example of the importance of technology in agriculture is ‘Farmer on Fire’, an agriculture **digital marketing** company which brings onboard farmers who might not otherwise be able to leverage on social media or other digital tools, give them more visibility and facilitate connections with other agripreneurs or customers.
Based on your experience and incubation programmes, how can innovation and technology be leveraged to make agriculture attractive to youth?

The first thing that is important to understand about Jacaranda Hub is that we answer to the demand of the youth and not the other way around. Young people have ideas and we build on this to see what structures we have or need to create to promote innovation in agriculture space.

One of the key pre-requisites to the development of innovation and digitalization is to build stable connectivity and digital infrastructure. Today, most of African big cities are well-connected but a lot can happen in rural areas. In these areas, access to job market is still limited so agriculture has even a bigger role to play.

It is hence critical to develop smart cities for youth. This will contribute to positioning agriculture as a venture and not as the traditional agriculture youth know about.

Indeed, the agriculture and agribusiness sector can bring greater market opportunities than youth might imagine. With digitalisation, linkages with other actors in their value chains, with other value chains or with other countries are facilitated.

We should be looking at where the real opportunities are and how innovation and technologies can accelerate these opportunities. It is time to modernize agriculture as traditional agriculture practices does not give the kind of impact required and cannot match the current demand.

Developing innovative solutions in agriculture will help maximize the use of our resources.

Furthermore, it is crucial to adopt a value chain approach to identify the sectors and nodes that carry higher potential and where innovation can create more value.

As such, one of the focuses of Jacaranda Hub is to provide capacity building and training in rural hubs to make sure that youth adopt innovation, with a view to facilitate transformation and create value addition.

Even in providing capacity-building, technologies are of great help. With new technologies, we can now reach all 10 provinces of the country and provide digital training and training using a variety of methods (VR, AI, off-grid sessions, etc.).

It should be underscored that using technologies to train farmers and agripreneurs locally does not necessarily require high technologies. For instance, we use featured phones or off-grid services to ensure training opportunities even without connection.
In 2014, you created ControlMed, the first private Tunisian company specialized in mass production of insects useful for agriculture. Since 2015, ControlMed participates in a national pilot program of biological control by useful insects, developed by The Tunisian Ministry of Agriculture and the interprofessional Grouping of Fruit. Tell us your story and how the idea came about.

- What are the environmental, social and technological motivations behind the business model? Impact on local employment and youth employment. What are the challenges encountered in terms of skilled employees, regulatory issues, market access? How is innovation and digitalization supporting in addressing some of these challenges?

Following my thesis in biology, plant protection and the environment, I wondered how Tunisia, a country with large resources, could launch a project related to **protecting plants using innovative, and environmental-friendly solutions**, such as useful insects.

- The first task was to verify the **legal framework**. For innovative solutions, such as using insects in agriculture, it might not exist and we had to be creative to find the best legal framework in which to set up our business.

- Pursuing my thesis between France and Tunisia helped with **creating contact with research and higher education institutes**. I partnered with researchers in a biological control programme against a pest pomegranate moth. Pomegranate is an important sector in Tunisia because of its exportation.

- We work in close collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and the interprofissional fruit grouping which aim at valorizing Tunisian agricultural products abroad and **strengthen a biological agriculture by reducing the use of pesticides**.

- Our solution, useful insects, is quite simple for farmers to implement. We raise insects in chambers, **using technologies to improve productivity** and follow up on the field to make sure the solution is efficient. We only use insects that exist in the Tunisian environment, to ensure we do not disturb the ecosystem.

- ControlMed got its first market in 2015, 6 months only after its launch, through a **public-private partnership** with national authorities and researchers to also foster the exchange of information.

- One of the other major aspects of our work is to **train farmers** who are interested in biological agriculture control.

- In partnership with Ministries and institutes, we develop training activities, such as field schools, to **engage more farmers in alternative methods** to pesticides.

- ControlMed aims at **promoting an innovative, sustainable, modern agriculture** that can attract youth while mitigating the major challenges faced by African agriculture today such as climate change or access to water.

- In terms of **facilitating access to finance**, there are a number of agripreneurship programmes funded by bilateral, multilateral or international organizations. For instance, MOBIDOC, an EU-funded project, facilitates the connection between PhD-students and the private sector to recruit more easily in highly innovative sectors. In Tunisia, the Startup Act Label also supports youth in creating their own startups.
National policies should be put in place to facilitate the transfer of technologies. For instance, creating incentives for foreign companies to start doing business in African countries while strengthening partnerships with local private sector can help ensure youth have easier access to existing technologies.

Sustainability should be a primary component of every development programme. Working with local actors and selecting activities that can be replicated or scaled-up can contribute to ensuring sustainability beyond the lifespan of the programme.

It is critical to create the necessary environment and digital infrastructure to ensure all youth, in urban, peri-urban or rural areas, can easily participate in the various programmes, activities, platforms. Every young man and woman should have access to IT equipment to facilitate capacity-building, networking, and market access.

Programmes that are focusing on youth should be inclusive of all youth. Through the development of partnerships with local organizations, as well as through open calls for participation, and with the help of new technologies, we can ensure bottom-up integration and strong youth engagement.

Developing strategic partnerships with international organisations, national programmes or the private sector can help ensure that incubation programmes or other capacity-building activities are affordable to young men and women whose financial resources might be limited.