



IITA

Youth Agripreneurs

Agriculture is the future

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Strengthening the capacity of youth agripreneurs



Youth Agripreneurs (from Nigeria, DR Congo, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda), IITA staff, and officials of Durante Fish Industry and Ekimiks Nigeria Limited at the training workshop

The IITA Youth Agripreneurs (IYA) recently participated in a three day training on Agripreneurial and Business Management sponsored by Mr Ekiyor Tope Miriki, the Managing Director of Ekimiks Nigeria Limited.

The training tagged: "Empowering Agripreneurs on Agripreneurial and Business Management," was held at the Conference Center of IITA headquarters in Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria with about 80 participants from Tanzania, DR Congo, Zambia, Uganda, Borno, Kano and Abuja.

In his address, the Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Dr Akinwunmi Adesina who was represented by the Regional Director, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD), Dr Lekan Quadri stated that

the training came at a time when "the government is working towards putting the country's agricultural sector on the path of youth engagement. This will provide the nation with the vehicle to change the fortunes of the teeming youth population and the nation as a whole."

He further added that the population explosion in Nigeria which had grown by an average of 16% annually since 2007 was having a dramatic negative effect on youth employment as an ever-increasing number of young men and women enter the workforce with limited prospects for employment. He stressed that there were simply not enough jobs to keep up with the growing youth population.

Dr Quadri said that in view of this, the Agricultural Transformation Agenda of the government recognised agriculture as a sector with the biggest potential for mass job creation, and the most viable for poverty alleviation among both urban and rural youth, as well as women.

Mr Ekiyor Tope Miriki, who sponsored the training, commended the Director General of IITA, Dr Nteranya Sanginga, for coming up with the IITA Youth Agripreneur initiative. He said that the initiative was one of the many solutions that would give youths the necessary opportunities to exit the unemployment queues and thrive as business owners.

"We are proud to associate with IITA. If we can have 50 more of these institutions encouraging young people like this, I am sure unemployment will become a thing of the past," he said.

Mr Miriki said that the sponsorship of the training was his own little contribution to the efforts of IITA, and that of the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Dr Akinwunmi Adesina in ensuring that young Nigerians and Africans were effectively equipped for the 21st century.

"The objective of the workshop is to bring high grade Business Management education like those obtained in the best business schools to our young agripreneurs. The curriculum has been carefully designed and it covers all major areas that an entrepreneur needs to develop the necessary proficiencies," he added.

Mr Miriki, however, urged the youths to grab the opportunities being offered in the sector. "I have listened to lots of political campaigns, and all they have been saying is agriculture. This is to tell you that the attention is gradually shifting back to the sector. So grab the opportunity being offered to you by this great institution," he said.

Dr Sanginga stated that the initiative which started from zero level is gradually becoming an important strategy and model for youth empowerment. "We are in serious engagement with several donors, and this model might probably be the largest project IITA will be engaged in if we succeed," he stated.

The IITA Youth Agripreneurs' Head of Capacity Development Unit, Ms Owoeye Molayo, in her welcome address said the training was an opportunity for the youths to be better equipped. She



Dr Lekan Quadri, representative of the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, giving a keynote address at the workshop

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thanked the sponsor of the program for investing in youths which she referred to as the future “millionaires and billionaires” of the country.

Side events at the opening ceremony included a motivational address by Chief (Mrs) Moji Ladipo (mni). Chief Ladipo, a former registrar of the University of Ibadan, urged the youths to see possibilities in all their endeavours and always believe in themselves.

Other dignitaries at the ceremony were the CEO Durante Fish Industries, Chief Ogie Alakija; Senior Technical Assistant to the Honourable Minister of Agriculture,

Dr Martin Fregene; and Deputy Director Youth and Gender FMARD, Mrs Karima Babangida. The scientists and management staff of IITA were also present at the ceremony.

The youths were taken through several sessions such as Leadership and Self Management, The Entrepreneur’s Mindset, Essential Business Skills, Building a Bankable Business, Achieving Operational Excellence, Excellence in Animal Husbandry, Best Practices in Crop Production, Business Accounting, Effective Sales and Marketing, Business Case Study during the three-day workshop.



Mr Ekiyor Tope Miriki, CEO Ekimiks Nigeria Limited while delivering a keynote address

Ekimiks sees prospect in IITA Youth Agripreneurs

Ekiyor Temitope Miriki is an entrepreneur. He is the Managing Director, Ekimiks Nigeria Limited. Ekimiks Nigeria Limited is one of the largest importers of frozen foods in the country. Mr Miriki also owns one of the largest cold rooms in Nigeria. In this interview, Mr Miriki talks about core business values and the entrepreneurship spirit.

Can you please tell us a bit about yourself?

My names are Ekiyor Temitope Miriki. I am a business man, with concerns in frozen foods especially fish importation and local fish farming.

Kindly share with us your journey into the world of business

That’s a good one. I can tell you I have been in business for over 20 years now. Actually I studied Banking and Finance, and later did a Masters in computer science but I have always had this passion for trading-business in general. Before I ventured into the fish business, I was a consultant in the Human Resource industry for about 14 years. Along the line, I discovered I had to diversify into something else, and that brought me to the food chain business.

You studied Banking and Finance from which institution?

From the University of Ilorin. I first went to the Polytechnic, before going for my Masters in computer science.

How has the journey been so far?

It has been like any other journey in life. Some people will say it has been a smooth one, some will say it has been rough, it depends on how you see it. But the good thing about life is that you must at every point in time prepare yourself for the ups and downs. The end is what matters most. So if I look back and say how far the journey has been?



Mr Ekiyor Tope Miriki, CEO, Ekimiks Nigeria

I will say it has been good because I am doing good.

What keeps you going considering the challenges faced by entrepreneurs in a developing economy like Nigeria?

Actually I can tell you one thing. Once you can cross the bridge, then you wouldn’t see it as a problem. You need to look at yourself and ask why do we have so many foreigners investing in the country? Because the return on investment in Nigeria cannot be compared to anywhere else in the world. So the focus and the dedication can make you go ahead and do whatever you want to do.

What motivated you to sponsor this training?

Like I said I have known Dr Sanginga for over 18 years, and I have never had any business relationship with IITA. All I come to do in IITA is to recreate and enjoy myself but from time to time we usually discuss. So in one of our discussion sessions, I was getting disturbed about the government’s policy on the agricultural sector. During our discussion, Dr Sanginga said, “I don’t

think you are getting the true picture. Maybe the people feeding you the information are not correct and genuine enough”. So on one of the visits of the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Dr Akinwunmi Adesina, to Ibadan; Dr Sanginga invited me and it didn’t take me more than 20 minutes of meeting him (Dr Adesina) to be convinced that Nigeria is probably on the right path for the first time in agriculture.

And during my meeting with Dr Adesina, we discussed some few issues affecting this country and all he could say was that “Nigerians are actually suffering themselves. People can actually make money without stealing.” And I asked him to really expatiate on that, and he broke it down. He said, “look, in this country, do you realize if you can pump your money into this and this, you can get a very good return?” And I didn’t need to think twice, I took those steps and it came out well for me. And getting to the sponsorship, I now looked at it and said, “what is it to contribute to the society?” I was shocked to hear this: The DG and the honourable minister said, “you know what? If you want to follow the train, the only thing you have to invest in is the youths coming up. Nothing else. If you invest in them, you can never go wrong.” So I thought the two of them have actually invested in me by telling me what to do. Investment comes in so many ways: Telling you what to do is an investment. They told me if you do this and that, you can never go wrong. That is what prompted me to invest in the Agripreneurs. Like I said, about a year ago, during the maiden visit of Durante Fish industry, I was part

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of the team and by the time I got back in November when I was invited by the IITA agripreneurs, and saw what you guys have done, I was more than impressed. I now thought that well, being a professional in the business sector, I have my own little contribution to you the agripreneurs. You the agripreneurs are into agriculture but you need the business understanding to excel.

Are you convinced that this initiative can actually bring the positive change expected in the agricultural sector?

I think it will. I have been to a lot of business schools all over the world but I can tell you that the Lagos Business School I went to about 8 years ago impacted a lot, and gave me a lot of courage because I have been making use of the materials given to me there. Like I said earlier, these materials are there for you to go back to. The three days workshop alone will not give you all that it takes. But if you go back to those materials, you will discover you can excel when you are taking decisions, because in any business, it is your decision making that matters most.

You said in one of your remarks that the IITA Youth Agripreneurs are now your competitors. Can you please shed more light on this ?

What I meant by competitors is that you are agripreneurs, you are coming into the industry, I am already in the industry. My dream and with what you've heard, you shouldn't look down on yourself; all you have to look at is that these

companies are there, I want to overtake them in 5 years, and that is what makes you a competitor.

Where do you see the IITA Youth Agripreneurs in the next 5 years?

It depends on the way you look at it. You don't even need that long number of years. There is something called check. You need to have a check on yourself. Where was I last year, where am I today? I have used those same criteria to measure myself in so many things. I have a couple of friends and each time we sit down we check ourselves and say look, where were you 20 years ago, where are you now, and where are you heading? Once you have those checks on yourself, it tells you if you are on the right course or not. In the next 5 years, I don't expect to see you people here. I want to see you people training others, having people working for you, and by then, you must have owned your own business or be managing a very big business. There are so many Nigerians that want to invest they don't know where to invest and people to manage it. But if you have the skills, what is stopping you.

The Agripreneurs will be embarking on their MBA soon, how do you see this?

Well, MBA Agribusiness is nothing new. You have MBA Oil and Gas, you have MBA Communications, I think what Professor Osofisan was trying to say is that if you want to follow the career aspect of it, you can. But even if you have the whole degrees and you are not focused on your core value, I

don't see you going anywhere. So your core values are; what am I into? That is, what do I really want to do? While you are operating your business, you can be taking this course because it's not going to be a full time thing. All they are planning is to impart more knowledge to enable you grow. The same program is already going on at Lagos Business School. It is called Agriprenurship. It's a 6 months program from 3 different modules and it is intensive. I have been able to meet someone who went for the program and is managing a very big farm with a very good salary. With your Agribusiness MBA, it is not everybody that will go to the farm. Some will diversify into management, HR etc. With your Agribusiness MBA, you can set up a business that will provide farms with skilled talents that they need so they don't need to start shopping all around or using unskilled people.

Any advice for the youths?

It is the same advice I will give myself. Once you remain focused, and you put in a lot of hard work, you are not likely to go off the track. I congratulate you guys. You are working with an international institution where everything is programed. The youth initiative is not a program that can derail in another 2 or 3 months. I think that is what the DG has been trying to do, to really make sure that it is really established so that even if he leaves IITA, agriprenurship will not leave IITA because it has gained worldwide recognition, and got the backing of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture in Nigeria.

Remarks from Participants



Kaira Mulaza from Zambia, 2nd Runner-up, Big Brother Africa 2014)

I am a musician by profession but I am now into agriculture. I came to learn about agriculture here to make a positive change in the sector especially among the youths in my country. One distinctive thing I learnt about the training is when the facilitator said we should have a plan B. Although I am a musician but my plan B is to spread the news on agriculture. I am interested in poultry and fishery.



Mercy Wakawa form Borno State, Nigeria

I thank Mr Ekiyor Tope Miriki, Dr Nteranya Sanginga and all our facilitators. We have achieved so many things in Borno State. We are taking back all that we have learnt to our colleagues in Borno State and we would call you, Mr Miriki, to come and witness our success.



Agripreneurs excited at the end of the training workshop

For more information on IITA Youth Agripreneurs (IYA)

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 www.iitayouthagripreneurs.wordpress.com

Photo news: Empowering Agripreneurs on Agripreneurial and Business Management, IITA Ibadan



Agripreneurs from Nigeria, DR Congo, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda at the training workshop



Dr Lekan Quadri (L), Godwin Atser (3rd from right), and Mrs Karima Babangida (2nd from right) at the IITA Youth Agripreneurs' fish ponds



At IYA's Seed processing centre: Mustapha Quadri (left) talks about maize and soybean seeds processing



At IYA's Hatchery Unit: Idowu Ayodeji talks about the hatching process



At IYA's Processing center: Obafemi Victoria talks about soy milk production



Mr Ekiyor Tope Miriki (right) and Chief Ogie Alakija at the training workshop



Mr Ekiyor Tope Miriki (left) presents certificate to Wakawa Gabriel, one of the agripreneurs from Nigeria



Dr Lekan Quadri (right) presents certificate to Rosette Migabo, one of the agripreneurs from DR Congo

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