

Forging Collaboration between the African Union Commission and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in the Interest of Africa's Increasingly Marginalized Youth



Prepared by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture for consideration by the Africa Union Commission and its African Youth Charter

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Front cover photo

IITA Youth Agripreneurs in Borno State working on their sorghum field in Maiduguri, Nigeria.

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Introduction

This Brief describes a desirable synergy between the common youth agendas of the African Union Commission (AUC) and that of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA). The Brief is developed with the intention of strengthening the collaboration between the two organizations as well as the alignment of the Youth in Agribusiness Unit, part of IITA's Partnership for Delivery Directorate, with the larger framework of the AUC Youth Program. The two Departments of AUC actively engaged in Youth programs are the Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology (DHRST), and the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA). In November 2017, IITA sent a mission to AUC, Addis Ababa, to discuss collaboration opportunities and meet with Commissioners and other senior staff of these two Departments to discuss a common youth entrepreneurship agenda. As an outcome of these discussions, we envisage a collaborative arrangement involving DHRST, DREA, and IITA focused upon Youth Entrepreneurship and Employment in Agriculture.

AUC Youth Programs

The youth programs of the African Union Commission (AUC) are housed primarily within the Human Resources and Youth Division under the Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology (HRST). It aims to strengthen opportunities for young people through capacity building to prepare them for a more meaningful contribution to Africa's socioeconomic renaissance. The Division is involved in implementing effectively targeted youth activities including the African Union Youth Volunteers Corps (AU-YVC) and Mapping of Youth-Led NGOs and Networks in Africa. The AUC Department on Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA) is also actively engaged in supporting youth entrepreneurship through agriculture (now commonly known as "agripreneurship").

The African Youth Charter of the AUC is a political and legal framework that provides a strategic framework and direction for youth empowerment and development activities at continental-, regional- and national-levels across Africa. The Charter addresses key issues affecting youth in the areas of employment, sustainable livelihoods, and youth participation, among others. In the area of Sustainable Livelihoods and Youth Employment, the Charter calls on State parties to ensure the availability of reliable and current data on youth employment, unemployment, and underemployment so as to facilitate the prioritization of the issue within national development programs. A solution to youth marginalization from economic mainstreams is seen through entrepreneurship training within school curricula, providing greater access to credit, business development skills training, mentorship opportunities, and better information on market opportunities. In this way, the

African Youth Charter offers a critical opportunity to consolidate diverse approaches toward youth empowerment across Africa.

IITA's Youth Programs

IITA recognizes the role of African youth within the modernization of agriculture through youth-led agribusiness as a critical but nascent element to job creation and rural development. Toward this end, IITA initiated the Youth Agripreneur Program at its headquarters in Ibadan, Nigeria, in 2012 as an agribusiness incubation platform; this initial establishment has since grown into a movement across Africa through three strategic mechanisms.

IITA Youth Agripreneur Movement (IYA). Increasing youth engagement in profitable agriculture and agribusiness has proven a critical, but not easily achieved element for sustainable agricultural development. In response, IITA gathered youth at its headquarters in Ibadan, Nigeria in August 2012 and established a pioneering agribusiness incubation that has now grown into the IITA Youth Agripreneur (IYA) Program. The program was designed to guide underemployed university graduates towards careers in market-oriented agriculture and agribusiness. The approach used was experiential, allowing clusters of youth to explore options for income generation, and then develop business plans and enterprises around the most promising ones. It required a few years to refine this empowerment model, but by 2017 the emerging Agripreneur Movement had expanded to 13 groups operating 36 learning-by-doing enterprises in six countries (DR Congo, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia). During this process, IYA developed several inventive agribusiness models attractive to young aspiring business persons, capacities in youth advocacy and



After undergoing training under IITA's youth incubation center, Agripreneurs establish profitable agribusiness enterprises.

agribusiness training; an array of effective communication, technical, and training tools targeting youth; and expertise in resource mobilization and partnership management. Today, IYA offers a valuable mechanism of providing leadership and services to youth across Africa, developing collaborative programs that advance youth agribusiness skills, and increasing both agribusiness opportunities and the creditworthiness of youth.



A group photograph of IYA members at their headquarters in Ibadan, Nigeria.

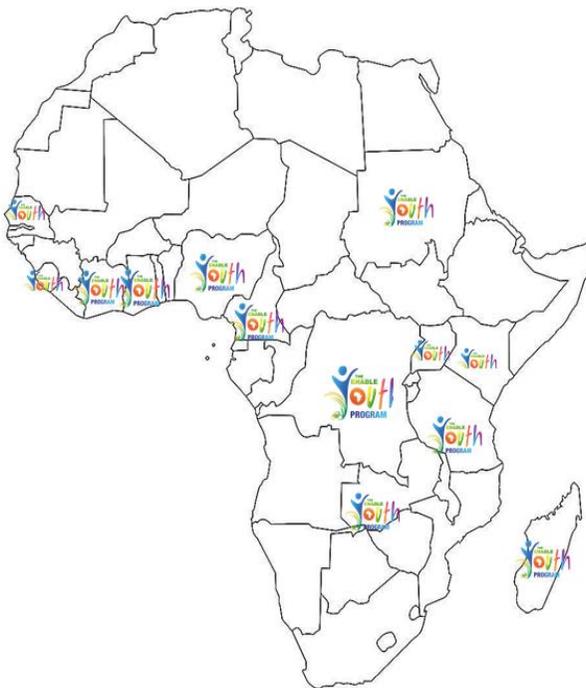
ENABLE Youth Program. ENABLE-Youth (Empowering Novel AgriBusiness-Led Employment for Youth in African Agriculture) is an African Development Bank Program based upon the early successes of the IITA Youth Agripreneurs model. The Program's stated goal is to expand opportunities in agriculture and agribusiness to youth to advance rural livelihoods and economic development across Africa. It operates as an Africa-wide loan program designed to provide opportunities to about 800,000 youth in more than 20 African countries. Program operations target more than 20,000 internships, over 10,000 agribusiness startups, and at least 30,000 well-paid jobs in rural and urban areas and are expected to generate revenues of over \$160 million per year into the future. Through these interventions, the ENABLE Youth Program mobilizes the energies and ambitions of youth as engines for employment and agricultural transformation, reducing migration to urban areas, and improves the self-image of youth through constructive mindset change, and their standing within their communities and African society.

The program's activities and gains are intended to extend well beyond the project's timeframe through linkages between youth groups, national programs, financial services, and future strategic interventions by the African Development Bank and other development partners. With IITA providing technical support, several Regional Member Countries including Cameroon, Côte D'Ivoire, DR Congo, Kenya, Ghana,

Madagascar, Senegal, and Sudan are presently implementing this program, and many others are in the process of developing loan applications.

ENABLE-TAAT Compact.

This is an important component of the recently launched Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation Program (TAAT)—a program supported by the African Development Bank. It links the ambition and enthusiasm of youth to the planned modernization of several strategic commodity value chains; rice, wheat, maize, sorghum and millet, cassava, sweet potato, beans, fish, and small livestock, in a manner that creates employment for youth, reduces food imports, increases value



Planned Actions by ENABLE Youth.

addition, and achieves nutritional security in Africa. It connects youth to the process of agricultural transformation necessary to secure economic prosperity through the process of youth-led agribusiness. Its operations are guided by four objectives: (1) To expand agribusiness opportunities; (2) To provide agribusiness support for those businesses; (3) To develop profitable enterprises around the new generation of improved crop varieties and animal breeds and their accompanying technologies; and (4) To promote the movement's successful empowerment model through linkage to others' initiatives.

ENABLE TAAT is a youth-led, gender-balanced, and visionary initiative. It currently operates in 19 African countries—Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte D'Ivoire, DR Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Togo, and Zambia. Its novel Agribusiness Completion mechanism results in "Quick Wins" through mentorship and innovative finance. Agribusiness Incubation expands experiential learning across all TAAT Value Chains. Youth Advocacy promotes the interests of youth and Food Basket Outreach mobilizes the commercial opportunities emerging from the release of new

biofortified crop varieties and other proven technologies advanced through the TAAT Program.

Proposal of Possible AUC-IITA Collaboration on Youth Entrepreneurship

IITA appreciates the emphasis of AUC on its diverse youth agenda and wishes to support the AUC in its achievement of the African Youth Charter. Our Agripreneur Youth Movement and its array of technical and training tools offer particular opportunity in scaling out the youth entrepreneurship drive at all levels across the continent. At the same time, our approaches must be evaluated by an independent, less-site specific perspective that AUC can offer. A starting point for this collaboration can be the identification of different avenues through compiling what sorts of actions are needed to achieve youth empowerment, how well IITA and its Agripreneur Movement meets these needs, and then strategize around the resulting "quick win" opportunities. At the same time the successful efforts of other agents of change must be factored into a collaborative regional effort. Many of the considerations that follow are borne from the hard-earned experiences of the Agripreneur Movement and its partnership with others.

- Many youth capacity development platforms are in operation, but systematic information is needed on how well and cost effectively they are delivering, and how they may be best expanded and replicated. IITA can assist in determining what opportunities offer the greatest potential and offer IYA accomplishments as a standard to what others have achieved. How can this knowledge be obtained, mapped, and managed?
- Several agribusiness models attractive to youth are recognized, such as seed and plant propagation business, horticulture, value addition, and fish and poultry production, but the technologies and marketing infrastructures needed for them are often absent. How can these enterprises be jump-started through combinations of national programs and private sector incentives?
- Ultimately agribusiness development must become incorporated into public vocational and tertiary educational curricula. How well can this formalized education be reconciled with the proven benefits from experiential learning within pilot enterprise settings?
- The private sector is an important mentor of expanded youth-led agribusiness development, but it has not always operated as an honest broker as its internships do not necessarily prepare participants to be complete agribusiness operators (thus spawning potential competitors). How can the commercial internships become better blended with agribusiness support to youth?
- Successful youth entrepreneurship is often well publicized, but not well documented, and often much may be learned from less-documented failures. What are the conditions necessary to successful agribusiness start up and acceleration? To what extent is success site-specific and what adjustments are

required to ensure wider replication and expansion? How can this information be best packaged and available to young business persons confronting difficulties?

- Many countries offer well-meaning national programs to youth but these often fail to gain traction, often because training activities remain top-down and loan opportunities remain too risk adverse. In other cases, these programs are not managed fairly or are politically staged. In too many cases, the benefits accrued by grassroots youth projects dissipate immediately as they end. How can the impacts of the national programs directed toward youth be improved, better linked to business mentorship and more affordable loans, and result in more lasting and better distributed gains?

These are some of the mega issues that we believe can be addressed through an AUC-IITA partnership in Youth Entrepreneurship Development in the framework of the African Youth Charter of AUC.

Conclusion

Mutual advantage is achievable through forging a partnership between the Africa Union Commission and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in supporting a common Youth in Agriculture agenda for Africa. Both institutions are committed to the belief that redirecting youth toward economic mainstreams is critical to achieving a prosperous Africa and in avoiding foreseen social catastrophe. IITA suggests that much of this new business be based upon agriculture and agro-processing, and has the experience to see this achieved. Youth are a great resource that can be harnessed to bring about real agricultural transformation in African countries. The AUC has a great role to play in ensuring support and visibility at the highest levels of governance among its membership, and IITA is well positioned to provide leadership to link this process with proven technical intervention and business models. This partnership outlined in this Brief is timely, in the best interest of Africa's youth, and warrants urgent consideration.

The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture has supported the hopes and ambitions of Africa's youth seeking better lives and livelihoods. Over the past six years, the institution has recorded a remarkable progression in change of mindset and orientation of youth about agriculture. This was achieved through agribusiness incubation and experiential learning, a result of which is the establishment of profitable businesses, service provision and self-employment.

