



IITA

Youth Agripreneurs

Agriculture is the future

BULLETIN

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CYAG project made me a better person- Project Beneficiary



One of the fish ponds set up by Jemide for a local fish farmer after his training with CYAG

My name is Jemide Joseph I am a native of Itsekiri. I am from Warri in Delta State, in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Before I started this training under the CYAG project, I was just a youth roaming about helplessly even though I had so much interest in pursuing a career in academics.

I became so helpless and frustrated to the extent that I was willing to do anything. I lived a reckless life, got involved in community governance, and became the youth secretary in our community.

I was not comfortable with my decision but I was focused. So when CYAG project came and I saw that it was being handled by young people like me, I said to myself: "If youth like this can come to teach me, it means someone taught them and they were ready for the change."

So, I decided to be like them or even better. I called few of my colleagues that were in the training together and I tried to convince them to live an exemplary life like the young training facilitators from IITA. I convinced them to desist from the wayward life we were used to in the Niger-Delta region and embrace what CYAG got to offer us. I told them I won't be a part of those that will lead chaos living again, and few of them yielded.

From there, I couldn't just think of any other thing than agriculture. Agriculture became part of me. So I called three of my colleagues to partner with me in aquaculture and we started our fish farm.

But I couldn't just hold back the zeal in me. There was something that kept pushing me to do more. In the process of time, I started consulting for people and setting up fish farms

for people to make money for myself.

I am proud to say that I am still not stopping here. I want a change in the Nige-Delta region especially in the life of the youth in my community.

Money gotten from crude oil activity is for a short period of time, but agriculture offers a cool cash and long-time job. The value chains have endless benefits. There are more to tell but I choose to stop here for now. But remember, you can't be alive without food in your system. More of this is needed in the Niger-Delta region.

Through the CYAG project, I have been able to start a program at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) where I am studying Environmental and Resource Management.

CYAG trainees a true reflection of the Mindset Change Theory



The CYAG trainees at IITA's cassava processing centre during their exploratory visit to IITA, Ibadan.

One of the techniques used by IITA Youth Agripreneurs in attracting young people into agribusiness is the mindset change theory. This is adopted to change the perception of young people about agriculture and stimulate their interest towards embracing agriculture as a business and creating jobs and employment opportunities along its value chains.

The mindset change theory spans through training which covers crop management, business management and leadership, exploratory visit to successful agribusiness enterprises, with constant mentoring and technical backstopping. These trainings are conducted both in the classroom and on the field and they expose young people to the untapped opportunities in agriculture. After the training, exploratory visits are conducted to agribusiness enterprises for the youths to relate with and apply what is being taught during the classroom trainings to the real agribusiness world. In the course of doing this, most trainees start identifying their area of interest in agriculture. The trainees then seek for advice on the way forward and develop plans around areas of interest through the assistance of IYA members who have become experts in the field.

This theory has been adopted by the capacity development team of IITA Youth Agripreneurs to implement some of the projects under the Youth in Agribusiness Office.

One of the numerous projects is the Community Youth Agribusiness Group (CYAG), funded by Chevron Nigeria Limited. CYAG started in 2016 and it is geared towards harnessing the energy of the Niger-Delta youth towards productivity in agribusiness with focus on catfish, cassava and plantain production. The project, which is being implemented in four communities in the Ijaw and Itsekiri areas is in phases with the first set of trainees now proceeding to the second phase. Initially when the project started, the IYA team led by Ifedayo Ibironke who was deployed to the project site had difficulties in convincing the youths about the opportunities available in agribusiness.

Recounting their ordeal during the kick-off of the project, the Project Manager, Ibironke Ifedayo stated that most of them were harassed, battered and abducted in a bid to discourage them from implementing the project.

"Executing a project in the Niger-Delta region is tough. When we approached the communities with our proposals and plans, they never took it seriously. But we were able to convince them. We thought that was just all we needed but when the trainings and field demonstration started, some of our farm implements were seized, my colleagues were beaten by community leaders who wanted a financial stake in the project, we were abducted when we couldn't meet their demands and some of the trainees were even used as bait to get us.

The trainees expected us to dish out money to them like most projects did in the past. So when we did not do that, they were disappointed and formed alliances with their community leaders. But we called for a dialogue and all the concerns raised were resolved amicably. The project sponsor, Chevron Nigeria Limited also played a crucial role in resolving some of these issues", he said.

Ifedayo attributed the initial lack of commitment recorded to the crude oil business being operated by youths in the region.

Majority of the youths in the region were already exposed to crude oil business, which they operated either legally or illegally. Some of them were recruited as miscreants and used by pipeline vandals in creating unrest with the oil workers in the region whenever the pipeline vandals plan to carry out their operations.

One of the trained youths in the region, Mr New-world Ugbameta, while narrating his encounter with the IYA team said it was difficult for them to accept the 'gospel of agribusiness' being preached to them by IYA because they were making a lot of money from their illegal operations but had no rest of mind.

"When IYA came and said agriculture could give us money, we all said it was one of the normal programs organized by the white people to distribute money in Niger-Delta. We were used to foreigners coming to give us money and they leave after some time so we

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did not take them seriously. We heard of farming but this kind of farming that we do is too stressful, so we opted for things that could fetch us quick returns. Even though we made money from these activities, but the police were always on our trail," he said.

But rather than back-off, the IYA team were persistent and selected 40 young people from the targeted communities for the first phase of the project. The classroom training took place in Warri, Delta state but they were taken to Oyo State for an exploratory visit.

One of the trainees, Afini Blessing said the technologies seen during their field

training and visit to agribusiness firms changed her orientation about how agriculture is practiced. "When I got to IITA Ibadan, I saw where they were using electricity to fry garri and I was amazed. In our area, we use the local pot and firewood and it takes a long time. The stress associated with it is much, so most of us run away from it. So, when I saw where they were using electricity to fry garri, I knew I could do my own garri in a better way, reduce stress and make lots of money," she stated.

Despite all odds, the project has recorded success, as some of the youths trained under the first phase of the project now have their independent enterprises.

The success recorded from the first phase led to an extension of the project by Chevron. The plan is to extend the opportunity to more youths in the Itsekiri and Ijaw community.

As the project progresses to the next phase, it is expected that more agribusiness enterprise will spin-off in the Niger-Delta region.

The results, milestones, and lessons learned have also served as basis for project designs and implementation for the Youth in Agribusiness Office.



Mr Niji, CEO of Niji Lucas Farms, interacting with the trainees on cassava value chain



CYAG trainees at Durante Fish Industry, Oyo for an exploratory visit on catfish enterprise



IYA members (on lemon t-shirt) with staff of Chevron Nigeria Limited at the project launch in 2016



A classroom orientation and induction exercise for the trainees



Arome Alfa interacting with the trainees at the demonstration site



The first classroom training for the CYAG project beneficiaries

A stitch in Time can Save Nine Others-CYAG Trainees



The business partners carrying out some pond maintenance

Jemide Joseph, New-world Ugbameta, Oris Ugbameta, and Austin Ikpi are trainees of the Community Youth in Agribusiness Group (CYAG) project funded by Chevron Nigeria Limited.

CYAG project, which is the first self-written project proposal by IITA Youth Agripreneurs started in 2016 and recorded some milestones despite the challenges encountered during the implementation of the project.

Jemide, Ugbameta, Oris and Austin are co-partners of AJONS Integrated Farms Limited, an agribusiness enterprise located in Ife community, Itsekiri Kingdom in Warri, Delta State. AJONS integrated farms currently runs a twenty two thousand (22,000) capacity catfish business using eight (8) ponds, which were rented for a period of one year.

These young men who are in their mid-thirties do not have the opportunity of attending tertiary institutions and were unemployed prior to their training and exposure to agribusiness. They were all used by pipeline vandals to wreak havoc on oil rigs in their areas.

One of the co-business owners, New-world said, "the pipeline vandals normally call on me and some other youths in our region to come together and cause havoc at the entrances of the

oil companies while they continue with their own operation at the oil rig. They used to pay us a little amount of money to cause distractions so that the oil workers will not know that vandalization was ongoing in their oil rigs. Even though we were making money from this, we never had peace of mind due to police arrests, and fights that sometimes resulted in stabbings," he stated.

The story is the same for the other three youngsters who through the agribusiness training have now become experts in fish farming business.

The team had displayed exceptional strength, dedication and willingness to learn during the demonstration phase of the project. Their determination according to them motivated them to go into the partnership business.



Ajons Integrated Farm partners at their fish pond

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AJONS business which is worth over 1.8 million naira (1.8m) started with the savings of the four partners.

They stated that the CYAG project came at a time when they were looking for means of creating an enterprise and earning a decent living. They added that, if more genuine projects like CYAG could be established in the Niger-Delta region, the youths in the region would be occupied and refrain from criminal acts like pipeline vandalization. According to them, the

timely intervention of agribusiness engagement in the region rescued many of them from their poverty.

Speaking on his mindset change, Newworld Ugbameta said the time spent in tending to his farm gives no chance for him to engage in nefarious acts.

"Whenever they [vandals] call me, I just look at my phone and switch off. Sometimes I will tell them I am coming but I just go straight to my ponds. This

project has really helped me, and I am sure if it continues, many youths involved in pipeline vandalization the Niger-Delta can also be transformed," he stated.

Newworld and his partners aim to become one of the largest fish farmers in the Niger-Delta region though faced with the financial and operational challenges. They are however open to partnership and sponsorship for expansion. More success stories are expected to be recorded in the second phase of the project.



The partners harvesting some catfish for test-cropping



The partners with the CYAG project manager

Celebrating the CYAG Project Team

The Community Youth in Agribusiness Group (CYAG) project is managed by three young Agripreneurs who were deployed to Warri from the IYA team in Ibadan and Abuja.

The team who are supported by their colleagues from the IITA Headquarters in Ibadan have so far successfully managed the project since 2016. They have shown commitment and dedication to fighting the cause of unemployment by devising strategies that will attract and engage the Niger-Delta youth in agribusiness.

They were initially faced with lots of challenges but have become stronger and determined to forge ahead to ensure that they realize the set objectives of the project as a team.

Sharing their experiences on the project, the team stated that how they have The team members share their experiences on the project.

Ibironke Ifedayo is the project Manager for CYAG. He is a graduate of Agronomy from Ekiti State University (EKSU) in Ekiti State. Ifedayo joined the Agripreneurs in 2014 and was part of the Capacity



Ibironke Ifedayo, addressing the CYAG trainees

Development Unit of IYA. He was part of the pioneer facilitators of the N2Africa Project which was sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. His exceptional display of passion for building the capacity of young people and implementing projects that focuses on empowerment of unemployed rural youth earned him the position to lead the CYAG Project team.

"Through this project, I have realized the importance of exposure. Most of the beneficiaries of this project had no opportunity of seeing development outside their immediate community. They were comfortable with their way of life, so they resisted the change that was brought to them. That is why we encountered a lot of problems when we started the project. They were

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Ifedayo Ibironke (2nd from right) with the trainees during the demonstration phase of the project at the fish pond

very hostile and saw everyone as their enemy. But immediately we started the training, they became eager to learn and that is why we have been able to record success," he said.

Gift Peter is the Administrative and Marketing Officer of CYAG project. She studied Plant Science at Ekiti State University in Ekiti State. Before joining the project as an Administrative Assistant, Gift was the team lead for the capacity development unit of IYA, Abuja. While relaying her experience, Gift said she was proud to be a part of young people

hostage situations, disruption of harvest and sales activities with community representatives demanding their share from proceeds of the demo fields. If lessons learnt are put into consideration when designing similar projects, it will go a long way in the sustainability of such projects," she said.

For Arome Alfa who is the Enterprise and Production Officer, the CYAG project has proven to be one of the models that can be adopted to resolve the agitations of the Niger-Delta youths. Arome who studied Agriculture from the University

of Abuja was deployed to Warri in Delta State from the IYA group in Abuja.

"Working as a joint implementer on this project has helped me a lot especially in the area of youth-to-youth approach, community engagement method, measuring rural social metrics, budgeting and professionalism.

We had a lot of challenges but the implementation team found a way to interface between all the stakeholders to achieve the core objective of the project," he stated.

making history in the Niger-Delta region.

"It has been an awesome experience working with the project, as it has exposed me to working relationships with indigenous residents of rural areas. The project so far has made great impact not only on direct beneficiaries but also on indirect beneficiaries. The project has also prompted startups of other agribusinesses within the environs. Amidst several successes, certain challenges were faced during the execution of project activities, one of which is the hostility of indigenes towards the project. We encountered



Gift Bawa (3rd from right) assisting the trainees with the sales of their commodity