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IITA Youth Agripreneurs – An Initiative to Empower Young People

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Abstract

Youth unemployment, poverty and a lack of positive outlook on life across many developing countries is becoming an increasing threat to the social fabric of communities. Agriculture is an essential driver of youth employment and empowerment and offers unique opportunities to create jobs and increase skills for young people in sub-Saharan Africa. IITA, under the leadership of Director General Dr Nteranya Sanginga, created the IITA Youth Agripreneurs (IYA) in August 2012.

The goal of IYA is engaging youths in productive market-oriented agriculture, agribusiness and service provision. IYA directly engages youth to use linkages along the value chains from production to processing, marketing, and ultimately to industrial and domestic consumption.

IYA's initial focus was production and distribution of quality seeds and has expanded to value addition leading to production of cassava bread, soymilk, and tidbit snacks, service delivery in capacity building and consultancies. The group also diversified into vegetable production, catfish farming and pig feeding for low fat pork.

IYA members come from various disciplines such as History, Computer Science, Quantity Surveying, Statistics, Biochemistry, Mass Media, Economics, Soil Science, Agronomy, and Crop Breeding. The group began with reorientation to prompt a change in mindset about agriculture in the youth. Despite limited knowledge of agriculture and agribusiness at the commencement of the program, the youths were able to gather great understanding and knowledge of “agripreneurship” through training both on and off the field.

IYA uses science-driven improvements in agriculture to make a distinctive contribution to solutions of the challenges faced in agriculture and agribusiness. In 2014 the Nigerian IYA cultivated 70 ha with a projection of 175 ha in 2015.

Currently the IYA concept is expanded to more countries and new groups have been established in DR Congo, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

Keywords: Job creation, lack of positive outlook, poverty, science-driven, skills improvement, unemployment