

THE NATIONAL AGRIBUSINESS INNOVATION CHALLENGE 2019

Fostering agribusiness innovation and creativity for youth employment

The National Agribusiness Innovations Challenge 2019 Awards Ceremony was successfully held at Silver Springs Hotel in Kampala, on December 12, 2019. The Challenge was first launched by the Consortium for Enhancing University Responsiveness to Agribusiness Development Ltd. (CURAD) in May 2014, with 250 entrants. The 2019 Agribusiness Innovations Challenge is co-hosted by Swisscontact and CURAD as a platform to encourage young people to take a keen interest in the agricultural sector as a source of employment and enterprise. Agriculture is traditionally viewed by young people as an unattractive, back-breaking sector that requires a lot of manual labour, with minimal returns. The Innovations Challenge hopes to harness their energy, dynamism, creativity and innovation into starting up innovative agribusiness ideas that could contribute to business growth and attract business partnerships. More importantly, it hopes to inspire ideas that have the potential to be replicated by other young people or to spur them on to join as investors or as a means of employment.

Why the Agribusiness Innovation Challenge?

Swisscontact believes the potential for agribusiness in Uganda is still untapped and greatly neglected. Agribusiness has the potential to provide young people with opportunities in enterprise, packaging, marketing and technological innovations in farming, among others. It also offers opportunities in climate-smart farming methods, as well as post-harvest and processing. In Uganda, Swisscontact is involved in private sector promotion through skills development, enterprise promotion, inclusive finance and the climate smart economy. **U-LEARN**, a project implemented by Swisscontact in partnership with Mastercard Foundation targets three broad sectors, namely agri-business, construction and hospitality. While fast-growing, these three sectors still lack the skilled labour forces that would meet demand and enhance growth. It is for this reason that Swisscontact decided to become a co-host of the National Agribusiness Innovations Challenge in 2018.

Expansion into a more inclusive innovations challenge

The National Agribusiness Challenge is now in its sixth year. At the awards ceremony in Kampala on December 12, 2019, 35 entrants were recognised for their ideas and plans in 12 categories. Winners were awarded a cash prize of 3 million shillings, while the runners-up and third place winner were awarded 2 million and 1.5 million shillings respectively.

Previously limited to university students, the 2019 edition of the Innovations Challenge was a bigger event with a wider selection of entrants drawn from across Uganda, irrespective of whether they went to school or not. This year's challenge saw two additional categories, which created much excitement and involvement of young people from across Uganda. They were Best Innovator in Horticulture in 2018 and Best Innovator in Aquaculture in 2019. The involvement of Swisscontact, along with efforts to widen the participation has meant there were more participants and winners representing the Central, Eastern, Northern and Western Regions for the first time. The more diversified Innovations Challenge has also demonstrated that while the agricultural sector - which employs over 70% of Uganda's population - is perceived as unattractive by young people, challenges such as this one, along with the rewards offered, have great potential to inspire great agribusiness ideas and enterprises. Not surprisingly, the theme this year was **Fostering Agribusiness Innovation and Creativity for Youth Employment**.

"Young people are at the centre of Swisscontact's development interventions. We are focused on building and facilitating strong and sustainable partnerships between business companies and young entrepreneurs/smallholder farmers based on win-win economic benefits."

Mrs Tania Haidara, Country Director for Swisscontact in Uganda

The National Agribusiness Innovation Challenge 2019 Award Ceremony

The challenge targeted women, youths, farmers, farmer organisations, student entrepreneurs and innovators with agribusiness ideas that have high potential for scaling up and the ability to positively impact society. The applicants had to be Ugandan citizens between the ages of 18 and 35 and not a winner in previous competitions. Women and people with disabilities were particularly encouraged to participate. Business that participated were those with annual turnover of less than 20 million Ugandan shillings, but showing potential for growth.

Over 200 submitted applications were reviewed for eligibility and completeness after the closing date, on 30th November 2019. Those who were shortlisted were trained in business pitching skills before they presented their innovations to a panel of judges. The panel of judges from the private sector included successful young entrepreneurs who evaluated the business idea/plan in a structured and professional manner. Thereafter, successful entries progressed to the preliminary judging stage. Judges considered whether the agribusiness idea complied with the entry terms and conditions, as well as the quality and content of the idea/plan. The entries were reviewed and judged according to specific criteria. Namely:

- Potential to create additional jobs;
- Future growth potential of the business;
- Viability and sustainability of the business idea;
- Market opportunities and competitiveness;
- Innovation, uniqueness and attractiveness of the venture.

Winning Innovations

A wide variety of innovations were presented, which reflected the depth of interest by young Ugandans in agriculture as an enterprise. The innovations ranged from:

Best start-up using ICT, enterprise, Western, Eastern, Central, Northern, established enterprise, climate-smart enterprise, student enterprise, Coffee trade idea, Horticulture farmer group, Women entrepreneur, Innovator in aquaculture

Edson Twinomugisha, representing Western Uganda emerged as the overall winner for the Agribusiness Innovations Challenge 2019, receiving five million shillings to boost his agribusiness enterprise. Edson's idea is to harvest bee venom, a venture that has great potential commercially, but which is largely ignored by bee farmers who focus more on harvesting honey. Yet the rewards are huge. It was an idea that is unique and one that can be replicated by other youths.



L-R Edison receiving award

The importance of the challenge in getting young people to turn their dreams into commercially successful businesses, is demonstrated further by Grace Eva Birungi, who won the Best Women Entrepreneur category. Grace produces poultry manure. She was inspired by the fact that every home has at least one bird producing faecal waste, a good raw material for manure production, yet many are faced with the challenge of a lack of good quality fertilisers. In November 2018, she heard about the Agribusiness Innovations Challenge, but was too late to take part. In 2019, she took advantage of the opportunity to enter her idea. Grace's ambition is to produce poultry manure at an even larger scale. Among her plans is linking up with the overall winner of the 2018 edition, who is in biogas production, to see how best she can create synergies and grow and expand her business and inspire other young people to learn from her example and replicate the idea of using poultry waste to produce manure in their homes.



Second left Guest of Honor Mr. Maxwell Otim Handing a certificate to one of the winners while Ms. Tania Haidara 2nd Right Swiss Contact country Director looks on.

Robinah Munduru, the only female winner in the regional category, won the Best Start-up Agribusiness Northern award. When Robinah set out to do her Bachelors of Agricultural course at Makerere University this year, her goal was to discover something new in her academic pursuits. The idea she had in mind was whether it was possible to process tamarind and bottle it as a drink. When she heard about the National Agribusiness Innovation Challenge, Robinah decided to enter her idea to be evaluated for an award.



Over all winner Edison in the mid with officials from Swisscontact and Ministry of ICT

The winners will go through a period of incubation and support. They will undergo training in the various areas they presented to win the challenge. This will include commercial enterprise development and planning, among other topics. They will also receive mentorship and where necessary, the technical support to transform their business ideas into ventures that can stand on their own and earn them income.

As Mrs. Tania Haidara, the country director for Swisscontact Uganda observed at the awards ceremony: "the objective of organising the 2019 National Agribusiness Innovation Challenge is to encourage young people to transform innovative agribusiness ideas into profitable and sustainable agribusiness ventures."

The awards ceremony at Silver Springs Hotel in Kampala was graced by a number of sponsors, among them Heifer international, Centenary Bank, Bank of Africa, Uganda National Young Farmers Association, the Uganda National Farmers Federation, KK Fresh Foods Ltd., Tropical Dynasty Ltd., Monitor Publications Ltd., as well as representatives from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation.

In a speech delivered on behalf of the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, the Director Research and Innovation, Mr. Maxwell Otim Onape lamented the disconnect between creating innovations and commercialising them. He noted that this is the reason for the high mortality of innovative ideas in Uganda. However, he commended the Agribusiness Innovations Challenge as one of the platforms that is helping to address this shortcoming by helping young people to incubate their ideas and turn them into flourishing ventures. He cautioned the young innovators not to sit back once their ideas were accepted, warning of the pitfalls in an increasingly competitive world. Drawing the example of Kodak, the famous photography company that went under because it disregarded the coming of the digital era, Mr Onape warned the young people gathered: "your innovation must be productive. But you also need to continue being innovative or you will go under!"



Celebrants with their accolades

He informed the young innovators of government's support through a 10-billion-shilling fund set aside to support innovative ideas. He said the National Research and Innovation Framework has been developed by government and disclosed plans to "stratify" the fund in order to support young innovators. "We are in business with you and we shall be with you for a long time," he said. Indeed, such government initiatives have already found a body of young innovators to support further, who have been identified and nurtured through platforms like the Innovation Challenge.

The National Agribusiness Innovation Challenge is demonstrating that young people can be creative and innovative and that their great ideas can be nurtured into successful agribusinesses. The number of applicants was higher than in previous years, with many entrants from rural areas. Swisscontact played a major role in ensuring this. Coupled with this, Swisscontact supported regional, district and sub county sensitisation meetings. Throughout the process, young women were continually encouraged to take part. This helped to strengthen the regional categories. "Inclusion is very important. By including young females, disadvantaged young people, both educated and uneducated, rural and urban youths, opportunities are created for anyone to actively contribute to broad based economic development," says Mrs. Tania Haidara, the Country Director of Swisscontact in Uganda.

Youth, the Backbone of the Agribusiness Sector

There is no doubt that agriculture in general and agribusiness in Uganda still holds vast, untapped potential, capable of providing unlimited employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for young people. The

increased number of sponsors is evidence that they see the potential when young people with skill and ideas in enterprise are organised. Many of these sponsors are partners in projects run by Swisscontact in Uganda. With the wider participation from across Uganda and more inclusive categories, many of the sponsors envisage business opportunities as more and more young people are attracted to and engage in agribusiness ventures.

Tropical dynasty exports fresh produce from Uganda. Speaking at the awards ceremony, while presiding over one of the winning categories, CEO, Mr. Michael Owino, praised the role that young people have played in his firm's growth. "Working with the youths has helped us upscale production from 60 tons to 120 tons per month," he said. But he also emphasised the need for specialisation when producing for export, if one is to succeed in the venture. He stressed the need to be compliant. "If you are going to specialise in producing for export, embrace it as an art... there is a lot of money in exports, but only if you are compliant with standards and regulations." As an example, stringent EU regulations are one of the hindrances to horticultural exports from Uganda, with very few able to comply.

These are the areas that the Agribusiness Innovation Challenge hopes to eventually address by encouraging creative and innovative ideas from an energetic and dynamic young population. Over 65% of Uganda's population is under 35 years and agriculture is potentially the sector that can absorb these numbers if both innovation and investment are applied.

However, even if agriculture is potentially very lucrative, young people and women still struggle to access opportunities that may enable them to pursue their goals. This is largely due to the lack of access to markets, production assets, extension services and gender-based and other damaging perceptions.

The Way Forward

Agribusinesses require a vibrant and flourishing agricultural sector in order to develop and grow. It is also true that the agricultural sector requires efficient and reliable extension services, which are responsive to the various farmers' needs. Equally true is the need for certified seeds and inputs for farming to flourish, alongside readily available credit and other resources. However, without integrating technology with new ideas, there can be no successful innovation in agribusiness and agriculture in general. Luckily, there are efforts by government in this direction, with new policies that are increasingly encouraging agro-processing as key to increasing the value of farmers' produce. An emphasis on developing home-grown smart ideas can enhance agriculture and agribusiness. The platform provided through the National Agribusiness Innovations Challenge demonstrates that the public and private sectors can work together to create an enabling environment, by providing incentives that will attract more young Ugandans to choose agribusiness as a career and/or entrepreneurial choice.

About Swisscontact

Swisscontact is the business-oriented independent foundation for International Development Cooperation. Swisscontact has a proven track record of successfully developing and implementing large-scale local economic and workforce development programmes, as well as financial services and sustainable resource programmes worldwide. In Uganda, Swisscontact implements two youth employment projects, Local Skills Development for the Youth (LSDY) and U-LEARN, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation. Through this intervention, the target is to reach out to 12,200 unemployed youths, focusing on three sectors, agribusiness, construction and hospitality. Swisscontact also runs the Inclusive Markets Uganda project targeting 23,000 Smallholder farmers (in the cocoa and beekeeping sectors); the Northern Uganda - Transforming the Economy through Climate Smart Agriculture (NUTECA Project) implemented in partnership with the Palladium Group. Its target is to reach 250,000 households by increasing their household incomes and climate resilience. Finally, the Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusiness (CASA) Project in partnership with NIRAs, is targeting 565,000 Smallholder farmers to benefit through improved livelihoods. Today over 7,000 young agripreneurs (from LSDY and U-LEARN) are in business partnerships with over 30 business companies, tapping into the local and export markets. They are engaged in hot pepper, chilli, soya bean, beans, rice, cage fish farming, beekeeping, cocoa, passion fruits, groundnuts and many other enterprises. In this way, young people are transforming from subsistence to commercial farmers and market-oriented entrepreneurs. Some of the young agripreneurs from the U-Learn Project competed in the 2019 National Agribusiness Innovation Challenge, with five of them emerging among the top winners.

Contact Details:

Tania Haidara, Country Director, Swisscontact
Tel: +256 414 222 431
tania.haidara@swisscontact.org
www.swisscontact.ch/uganda