The National Agribusiness Innovative Challenge is an initiative designed to create a platform for harnessing talent and showcasing excellence in innovation among youth and women.

The challenge was first launched in 2014 by the Consortium for enhancing University Responsiveness to Agribusiness Development Limited (CURAD). Since then, the major achievements have been: i) Over 374 youth start-up enterprises have been identified and have received both technical and financial support. These entrepreneurs have built bankable businesses that have created 2,930 full-time and part-time jobs. ii) 20 technologies have been commercialised in seven value chains. iii) 30 student entrepreneurs have been supported through the Earn as You Learn (EAYL) Programme. The EAYL enables students to start agribusiness ventures as they learn, with the objective of ensuring that upon graduation, they continue running their business vis a vis looking for jobs. iv) 15,560 smallholder farmers are benefiting as suppliers of raw materials to supported agribusinesses identified through the innovation challenge. v) 31 female-led enterprises have been supported to start and run own business.

The challenge provides valuable opportunities to both the public and private sectors to support and stimulate agribusiness agripreneurs’ competitiveness and enterprise growth. In the previous editions, over 374 agripreneurs had the opportunity to transform agribusiness ideas into commercial enterprises and benefitted from tailor-made business training, mentorship, linkages to ready market, incubators and accelerators focusing on shared services and access to capital.
Youth in the Agribusiness Sector

The agribusiness sector in Uganda includes the entire chain of activities, including production, processing, transportation and marketing. The importance of this sector has grown significantly as agricultural development strategies have shifted from a purely production-oriented approach to a broader systems-based approach, involving agri-food chain coordination, value creation and institutional setting under which chains operate. Rapid adoption of appropriate inputs, technologies and profitable and reliable markets would drive the youth from subsistence farming and contribute to a more robust, demand-driven and export-oriented agribusiness sector.

To-date, the informal system controls more than 80% of the market and is highly unregulated and uncoordinated with small and under-capitalised companies that cannot develop meaningful business partnerships with agripreneurs. The volume and quality of exports is still low and cannot compete favourably in either regional or international markets. Uganda has the potential to expand its production and export of staple foods and processed products to the region. Exploiting this potential would increase employment opportunities along several value chains and help to reduce poverty within the country. This would then showcase the dominance of the agricultural sector in the country’s efforts to reduce poverty and attain economic growth in the short-term.

Underlying Opportunities for the Youth in the Agribusiness Sector

Young people are a key part of the solution to increasing agricultural productivity in Uganda. The sector holds many opportunities for the youth to break the cycle of low productivity, increase their earning potential and contribute to the national economy at large. While agriculture can be a very lucrative business, young people struggle to access opportunities and to pursue their goals, largely due to lack of access to finance, extension services and well as gender-based and other damaging perceptions.
Agri-business holds one of the highest potentials for youth employment in the different value chains that are attractive to youths. These are poultry, apiary and horticulture, which includes vegetables, tree fruits, aquaculture and staple food crops like maize, soya beans and oil seeds. The country has emerging opportunities for youths to invest both on-farm and off-farm, building on youth innovation and creativity to develop a reliable and sustainable supply of agribusiness products.

While there is high potential for value addition on Uganda’s agricultural products, the main exports to the international market are exported in the raw form, hence limiting Uganda from capturing a larger share of both the local and international market. Agro-processing and value addition in agricultural production can take different forms and levels, ranging from the basic to more sophisticated, e.g. packaging, processing, cooling, drying, extracting or any other type of process that differentiates the product from the original raw commodity.

The National Agribusiness Challenge 2019

The 2019 Agribusiness Innovation Challenge is geared towards stimulating innovation, competitiveness and creativity among young agripreneurs. It is intended to generate unique and realistic business ideas, as well as strengthen and promote existing enterprises with high social and economic benefits. The theme of the 2019 Agribusiness Innovation Challenge is “Fostering agribusiness innovation and creativity for youth employment”.

The 2019 edition will support agripreneurs from Northern, Eastern, South-Western and Central regions of Uganda. Young people will form the bulk of all participation in all the processes, including as applicants, judges and facilitators. The judges for the entire process will be young people with hands-on experience of the challenges and a deep understanding of the aspirations of the young agripreneurs.
The fisheries sector in Uganda is the second highest foreign exchange earner for the country. Investment into the sector is increasing due to the fact that aquaculture products from Uganda have already been approved for export to EU markets. The economic benefits of the sector have led to the incorporation of the aquaculture category into this year’s Challenge, to provide more opportunity to the youth engaged in aquaculture enterprises.

This year’s edition will also re-introduce the female category in order to recognise and support more female agripreneurs and innovators. Women make a very large contribution to the agribusiness sector in Uganda; we need to embrace their amazing talents, their ability to solve problems and to innovate. This year’s edition will provide a platform for the women to turn their ideas into tangible business ventures with the mentorship, coaching and the incubation support that will be given.

About CURAD and Swisscontact

The Consortium for enhancing University Responsiveness to Agribusiness Development Limited (CURAD) is a public-private partnership initiative promoted by Makerere University, the National Union of Coffee Agribusinesses and Farm Enterprises Limited (NUCAFE), and the National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO). CURAD is one of the leading agribusiness incubators in Uganda that supports skilled and unskilled young men and women as students, graduates, start-ups and SMEs to grow and develop their business ideas into profitable enterprises.

CURAD is implementing a four-year project in Agribusiness Incubation and Agripark establishment, in partnership with aBi Development Limited. The objectives are to scale-up local processing of dry fruits and vegetable products for both domestic retail and export markets; to support commercial production and export of fresh horticulture products; and to support additional SMEs to grow their businesses through the accelerator unit. Over 15,000 beneficiaries will be supported from the initiative.

On the other hand, Swisscontact is the business-oriented independent foundation for international development cooperation. We have a proven track record of successfully developing and implementing large-scale local economic and workforce development programmes, as well as financial services and sustainable resources programmes worldwide.

In Uganda, Swisscontact implements a five-year $10.6 million Youth Employment project in the agribusiness, construction and hospitality sectors, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation. In this intervention, Swisscontact builds business partnerships with companies to deliver products and services, including youth learning, market and information, as well as business support services and financial capability building. The same approach and sectors are used to implement the local skills development for the youth project in Eastern Uganda.
Other projects being implemented include the Inclusive Markets Uganda Project. It develops business partnerships between smallholder cocoa farmers and cocoa companies and facilitates access to services that improve both the quality and quantity of apiary products. In the area of financial services, Swisscontact introduced microleasing in Uganda, with several financial intermediaries including SACCOs.

Microleasing promotes access to productive assets for rural smallholder farmers. Furthermore, Swisscontact is active in Northern Uganda and is implementing a markets development project called NU-TEC MD (Northern Uganda – Transforming the Economy through Climate Smart Agri-Business Market Development), in partnership with the Palladium Group. The project is a component of a seven-year DFID-funded programme that aims to increase the incomes and climate resilience of poor men and women in Northern Uganda, by stimulating sustainable, pro-poor growth in selected agricultural markets and improving the position of poor men and women within these market systems by making the market systems more inclusive.

With these interventions, Swisscontact aims to raise over 12,000 young people sustainably out of poverty in Uganda by increasing their competitiveness in the job market and improving their self-employment opportunities. This goal is pursued through facilitating workforce development and financing mechanisms, as well as promoting access to business support services and youth business platforms.

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