

Africa goes green and digital with a consortium of 30 agritech entrepreneurs

By Aida El Kohen and Hamza Rkha Chaham

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Today, the world relies on Africa as the last growth frontier as it becomes an increasingly urban and booming continent. However, there is still a long way to go before it catches up with Asian emerging economies. In fact, Africa has the lowest wheat yield in the world compared to the highest one in the Netherlands. 55% of African arable land available is not cultivated as opposed to the 8% in North America. These numbers highlight the high potential for expansion and investment in the African agricultural industry.



The critical future of African agriculture

Compared to other industries, agriculture has been slow to adopt the leading edge of technologies from the Digital Revolution. The time has come for Africa to experience its own Green Revolution thanks to better access to financing information (Big Data) and technology (remote sensing). Funded by the European Commission based in the Netherlands, CTA -Technical Center for Agriculture and Rural Cooperation and SOWIT have taken a flying leap into drone technology.

An experience capitalisation workshop gathering 10 African drone operators

Recognising the disruptive digital opportunities provided by UAV (unmanned aerial vehicles) in agriculture, Hamza Rkha Chaham, founder of SOWIT and former head of international development at AIRINOV, partnered with CTA. Last year, they trained 10 African entrepreneurs into becoming leaders in the drone operating industry.

Countries represented were Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. A year after this training, these participants as well as EY, a leading consulting firm, met in Ghana for an *experience capitalisation* workshop from 18 to 23 June. The objectives of this workshop were not only to improve business efficiency and enterprise management as drone operators but also to share and analyse the challenges, successes, and failures in operationalising drone services in Africa.



Digitalising agriculture

Giacomo Rambaldi, the senior programme coordinator at CTA, asserts that focusing on the digitalization of agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa, Pacific and the Caribbean has recently been his main focus.

By supporting the development of African entrepreneurs, these 10 drone operators are now able to use remotely sensed images to improve the yield of local farmers and agribusinesses. As a result, CTA is collaborating with SOWIT, a French tech start-up that builds tailored decision support tools empowering African farmers through Smart Data analytics and remote sensing.

"Not only do we operationalise drone technology able to provide basic processing of crop conditions (NDVI indicator) but we also make sure that it is creating additional value for the farmer or agribusiness."

Thus, for each project Hamza and Giacomo undertake, they look forward to performing a cost-benefit analysis to ensure that farmers get a return on investment after paying for a drone flight and crop advice from their local drone operators. SOWIT's mission relies on modelling tailored decision support tool to achieve the highest value in order to fit the farmer's need and local conditions. By using drones with cutting-edge sensors, SOWIT surveys the crops, keeps their data updated, and informs agribusinesses about the areas that require improvement.

The **Experience Capitalisation Workshop** resulted in the creation an African drone operator consortium called AfricaGoesDigital.

Watch the following video to understand their objective:

[AfricaGoesDigital Consortium](#) from [CTA](#) on [Vimeo](#).

With these 20 newly trained drone operators from Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Uganda, Cameroon, Angola and Malawi, the consortium AfricanGoesDigital is growing.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hanza Rkha Chaham is an entrepreneur and the Founder of SOMIT, a French agritech startup that uses drone technology for Precision Agriculture. As the Former head of international development at AIRINOV, Hanza has developed and implemented agritech solutions for farmers in 14 countries in Africa, the Middle-East and South East Asia.

Aida El Kohen is studying Economics at Wellesley College. Her passion lies at the intersection between international development, technology and business. She is currently interning at SOMIT as a business development analyst.

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