Smallholder farmers in Africa often find themselves lacking the necessary experience and skills to run a business or take an existing one to the next level, which would enable them to deal with other actors, such as banks or large enterprises. Young agri-preneurs are a key category to address for coaching and business support, as more than 60 percent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa is under the age of 25 (a number expected to double by 2050).

Agriculture has the potential to engage the growing number of young people in entrepreneurship and innovation, generating employment opportunities for the rural youth, yet this group tends to lack the required resources and training to launch their own business. The same happens with female entrepreneurs whose potential is further limited by the socio-cultural context, which restrains their autonomy and self-confidence as entrepreneurs, as well as their access to education, finance, and land.

Tackling this situation calls for targeted, gender-based vocational and skill development training as well as mentoring to change mindsets and develop their entrepreneurship potential. Agricultural entrepreneurship abilities are crucial for the youth, and for smallholder farmers in general, to gain access to new markets and service providers. These include, for example, developing farm plans, as well as working with farmers’ organisations in the field of market analysis, financing, sales and developing business opportunities.

EUCORD is a non-profit organization registered as a cooperative in the Netherlands, whose mission is to increase farmers’ capacity to sustainably grow quality crops matched to the commercial needs of the agribusiness sector and in doing so, increase food security, develop the private sector and improve the livelihoods of rural communities. Working since 2003, EUCORD has four fulltime staff in Brussels and over 60 in-country staff based in Africa. Currently, projects are underway in DRC, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda and Senegal, while we have project implementation experience in Burundi, Ghana, Kenya, Sierra Leone and Uganda.
EUCORD is committed to assist with the development of management and entrepreneurial skills for farmers, by providing training and mentoring to entrepreneurs to help turn an idea into a business, develop an entrepreneurial mindset, apply gender-specific approaches to entrepreneurship, carrying our market studies and develop a business plan.

CURRENT AND PAST PROJECTS

Development of agricultural entrepreneurship is a focus in many of EUCORD’s projects:

- In Mali, EUCORD provided business development and financial mediation support to producers organization (Feed the Future Mali Sugu Yiriwa Activity).
- In Guinea, EUCORD supports business development of potato producers, seed producers, service providers and a processor. Over a 100 entrepreneurs developed business plans and preparing loan requests to MFIs or banks (Potato Entrepreneurship Project, PEP).
- Also in Guinea, EUCORD addresses the specific constraints that women face when running a business by providing literacy and financial training to women entrepreneurs (Women Entrepreneurship Project, PEP-FEM).
- In Ethiopia, EUCORD designed and implemented an input sourcing business model for an animal feed producer. During this activity, agri-business leadership training was provided to more than 40 maize and soya meal suppliers.
- In Sierra Leone, EUCORD implemented a sorghum value chain project in partnership with Sierra Leone Brewery Ltd which included business training of nucleus farmers (CREATE).

WAY FORWARD

EUCORD recognizes the importance of entrepreneurship skills to smallholder farmers and will continue to:

- Support farmers to develop market-oriented business plans to expand their business, establish relationships with suppliers and clients and create market linkages through targeted training and mentoring.
- Focus on introducing agronomic practices and services to help farmers optimise their net revenue, while taking care of the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Facilitate access to micro-finance to smallholder farmers, and coach them on presenting requests for funding to banks or MFIs.
- Empower the role of women and youth in agricultural entrepreneurship through vocational and skill development training, providing information, financial support, technology and market linkages.
- Build the capacity of farmers organisations and promote an entrepreneurial mindset among rural people.
- Spread the use of digital platforms to facilitate business development.