

GrowUp 2022 Demo Day: Sustainable Food Systems in East Africa – Highlights

The GrowUp Program, organized by Yunus Environment Hub, presented the Demo Day of the 2nd cohort, which took place on July 13, 2022.

About GrowUp

Our GrowUp Incubator is a unique program that focuses on supporting and advancing innovative business solutions that have the potential to address current environmental and social issues in East Africa¹. Our program provides critical support to social business entrepreneurs in the post-revenue stage. Furthermore, during the incubation stage, the social business entrepreneurs receive tailored mentorship based on their needs, interactive capacity-building workshops and networking opportunities with local partners, and peer-to-peer support to share challenges and explore solutions. By the end of the incubation period, entrepreneurs gain knowledge, skills, and tools that allow them to:

- Refine its partnerships and operational model
- Analyse the product-market fit for multiple contexts
- Find viable routes to scale and grow
- Integrate impact evaluation into the operational model
- Identify financial sustainability model and financial opportunities

Demo Day 2022

The Eastern African subregion is one of the poorest regions in the world and has chronic food security problems. In fact, crop productivity is significantly lower than in any other world region (see Figure 1). Thus, the agriculture and food sector have an enormous environmental and social footprint in East Africa. Moreover, it is a proven engine for poverty reduction, with about 80% of the region's population living in rural areas and depending on it for their livelihood².

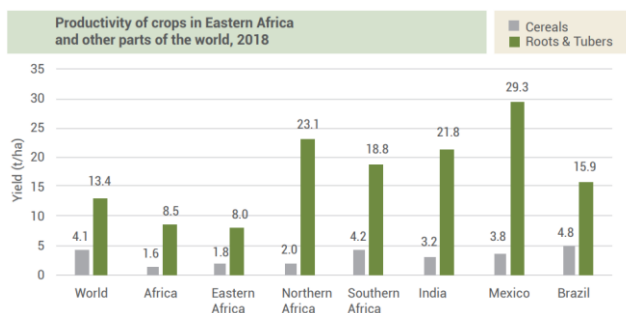


Figure 1. Productivity of crops in Eastern Africa and other parts of the world, 2018. Source: FAO 2020³

In this regard, the 2022 cohort of YEH's GrowUp Incubator presented their social business solutions that are contributing to more sustainable food systems in East Africa. The inubatees pitched their solutions to an audience of social investors in order to get support for scaling up their social business and becoming self-sustainable. During the Demo Day, ten pioneers of East Africa's sustainable food system presented their ground-breaking solutions in two blocks. As a keynote speaker, Magana Gikandi from the United Nations World Food Programme presented the current figures on food insecurity in Eastern Africa and the role of social business entrepreneurs.

¹ Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda

² FAO (2021)

³ FAO (2020)

Commented [LW1]: @Leshan Waithira Hi Leshan, please read this - if you have any suggested changes, pls use track changes and comments. The Call for Applications is not relevant anymore. You could adapt it to suit the current phase in the cohort. We are currently screening applications and conducting interviews.

Commented [LW2R1]: We can practice with this article the blog posting this week.

Commented [LW3R1]: This is well noted Luise. Should I change the Call for Application paragraph? I did not quite understand the instruction.

The entrepreneurs

Nutritious Agriculture Network-Kenya

Dora Momanyi⁴, Founder

Dora pointed out that the current snacking sector offers highly processed snacks to consumers, resulting in a significant prevalence of non-communicable diseases due to malnutrition. On top of that, many ingredients from current snacks are imported from overseas, contributing to the carbon emissions that aggravate the climate injustices that Africa is currently facing. Against this backdrop, Momanyi founded iPop Africa, an initiative promoting climate-resilient and low-investment African crops through the production of plant-based snacks, cereals, and well-nourished lunch bars sourced from farmers in the low-income areas around Nairobi, Kenya. Momanyi stated that the popping technology outstands because the cereals are minimally processed, are oil-free, and ensure a nutritious diet. Furthermore, its ingredients are sourced locally from smallholder farmers.

Omishtu Joy - Ethiopia

Abdiwak Bekele⁵, Co-Founder

Omishtu-Joy is an agritech company that aims to solve agricultural issues using a technological approach. Bekele mentioned that most developing countries have great agricultural potential due to the vast areas of fertile land, diverse climate patterns, consistent rainfall, and large labor pool. However, according to Bekele, there is still low crop productivity because farmers do not have a soil quality status and comparability information of crops before sowing. Therefore, the lack of knowledge on soil management leads to crop loss. In this context, Omishtu-Joy offers a set of devices – based on AI – that assess the soil quality and interprets soil parameters⁶ into management suggestions for appropriate crops for certain farmland. As a result, Omishtu-Joy technology improves crop productivity. The field parameters data is sent to a mobile application where the farmer can access and analyze for better soil management, leading to greater crop productivity. For instance, Bekele shared with the audience a remarkable case study in Ethiopia, where cereal production per hectare increased from 14 to 19.2 quintals per hectare using Omishtu-joy technology.

MIAgro Shoppers - Uganda

Micheal Ainomugisha⁷, Co-Founder

Micheal, Co-Founder of MI Agro Shoppers, opened his pitch by highlighting the dimension of the agricultural sector in Uganda: *“in Uganda, 60% of the population is dedicated to farming and a vast majority of them contribute to soil erosion due to lack of sustainable farming practices”*. On top of that, farmers have limited access to the market, and a significant portion of the products harvested do not make it to the final customers. From this perspective, Micheal funded MIAgro Shoppers, an e-commerce digital shopping platform focusing on the supply chain management of products harvested from local farmers by building an efficient network between farmers and the market. The online platform, MIAgro Shoppers, offers a range of products from agricultural groceries, gas accessories, supermarket items, and kitchenware delivered to people’s doorstep in and around Kampala, Uganda. This social business delivers fresh products to the customers and provides the farmers with training on agroforestry and sustainable agriculture practices.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the ten social business entrepreneurs bringing innovative solutions to food systems across East Africa.

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⁶ Appropriate pH value, compatible soil type, NPK proportions and agro-ecological parameters

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Food Insecurity in Eastern Africa

Magana Gikandi, Regional Innovations & Private Sector Partnerships at UN World Food Programme (WFP)

Magana Gikandi began his presentation by introducing the mission of the WFP, which is to nurture and scale sustainable innovations to increase food security in Eastern Africa. To that end, they aim to leverage WFP's brand, partnerships, deep-field access, and provide expertise. Then, in order to provide context and show the big picture of the problem, Gikandi shared the recent figures on food insecurity in Eastern Africa. According to Gikandi, 89 million people live in food insecurity in Eastern Africa, especially in South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia, which are the hotspots of the most significant concern.

Furthermore, Gikandi pointed out that food insecurity is expected to be worsened due to the Ukrainian crisis (increase in costs and a decrease in cereal production) and the dramatic drought in the horn of Africa, which has been exacerbated due to climate change. Nevertheless, Gikandi transmitted his optimism: *"early action is key to averting catastrophe."* Furthermore, he pointed out that innovators, such as the YEH's incubates, play a key role in achieving zero hunger because they build sustainable and resilient food systems, lift people out of poverty, and improve nutrition. However, Gikandi highlighted that the innovations must be coupled with early and late seed funding by humanitarian and development actors to support the scale-up of promising businesses and innovations.

[Click here to access our Demo Day 2022 recording](#)

