



Heifer International Kenya Country Director Esta Kamau speaks during the launch of three transformative agri-tech innovations in Nairobi. Photo Credit: Francis Mwangi/Heifer International.

Heifer rolls out support for agri-tech and mechanisation

By Murimi Gitari

HEIFER International has committed additional funding to agricultural innovations aimed at bridging gaps in access to information, farm mechanisation, finance and markets by smallholders in Africa.

The global non-profit development organisation will give cash grants to winners of its AYuTe Africa Challenge, which supports young agri-tech innovators and entrepreneurs to scale their businesses.

Up to USD 1.5 million is awarded annually to the most promising young agri-tech innovators across Africa with affordable solutions to support Heifer International's goal of helping more than six million African farmers earn a sustainable living income by 2030.

Speaking during the launch of the Kenyan edition of the competition in Nairobi, Heifer International Kenya, country director Esta Kamau, said that the organisation is committed to investing in strategic innovations in advancing agriculture technology and mechanization.

In 2022, national competitions in Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, and Uganda will award up to \$20,000 in each country, with more to follow in 2023

The AYuTe Africa Challenge is one of the three innovation projects earmarked for Heifer's support, the others being Tractors 4 Africa (T4A) and Digital Agriculture Champions (DACs).

The Tractors 4 Africa is a financing product that seeks to unlock low-

risk, low-cost tractor loans for rural entrepreneurs servicing smallholder farmers, enabling these farmers to plant their fields efficiently when the timing is right.

"Under the Tractors 4 Africa (T4A), Heifer International will finance an additional 75 tractors across Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda. This intervention aims to provide affordable access to tractor services to smallholder farmers at an affordable rate, boosting farm productivity, employment, food security and farmer livelihoods over the next ten years. The investment will create new jobs as booking agents, tractor operators, technicians and tractor owners over 10 years," said Ms Kamau.

Tractor leasing firm Hello Tractor, one of the two 2021 AYuTe Africa Challenge champions, is partnering with Heifer on the Tractors 4 Africa (T4A) project and has a lot to offer in terms of best practice.

Hello Tractor has invested the grant awarded in 2021 to finance 17 tractors for 17 entrepreneurs in Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda.

Speaking during a panel discussion during the launch, Jehiel Oliver, the chief executive officer of Hello Tractor, said that efforts to make farming profitable for smallholders requires a lot of coordination.

"We are always adapting to our market and understanding the farmer's needs which creates an opportunity for us as innovators to come together to holistically serve these farmers," he said.

Kuza Biashara, a digital social enterprise, is Heifer's technical partner on Digital Agriculture Champions (DACs), which seeks to foster the

application of digital technology in agriculture to address challenges faced by smallholder farmers in accessing markets and extension services.

The initiative will offer personalised digital training and extension services to smallholder farmers in Africa, starting with Kenya.

"The launch of the third innovation, Digital Agriculture Champions, aims at investing in digital extension systems for training as a post-pandemic response strategy that will create efficient, scalable solutions for farmers and help boost the value chains in which they work," said Ms Kamau.

Kuza Biashara founder Sriram Bharatam said the initiative will equip the front-line extension workers across Heifer's multiple programmes with the skills to promote adoption of sustainable farming business models among farmers.

Those incubated on the DACs project will be expected to engage approximately 200 households each

in rural communities, giving them the knowledge, tools and networks needed to transform how they do business in a sustainable way.

Kenya's Cabinet minister for ICT, Innovation and Youth Affairs, Joe Mucheru, noted that mechanisation is vital for attracting the youth to agriculture, reducing the cost of production and building profitable and sustainable farming businesses.

"Engaging the youth in agriculture through technology is long overdue and the three agri-tech innovations by Heifer Kenya have come at the right time for Kenya when youth unemployment is ballooning. The youth offer a dynamic and innovative workforce; have a high uptake of technological know-how and the ability to take on significant levels of risk whose positive impact changes the destiny of any nation," Mr Mucheru said in a speech read on his behalf by Dr. Ronoh Kiprono, the CEO of the ICT Authority.



Participants cheer the official launch of the three transformative agri-tech innovations by Heifer International Kenya. Photo Credit: Francis Mwsangi/Heifer International.