



Halima Nenkari, from the Department of Livestock Production, presents an award to the AYUte Africa Challenge Kenya 2023 winner, Mutuma Muriuki from Eco Bristo. Photo Credit: Heifer Kenya

Agritech startups win cash grants, scholarships in Heifer's AYUte Africa Challenge

By Murimi Gitari

HEIFER Kenya has announced the winners of the 2023 AYUte Africa Challenge Kenya in a ceremony held in Nairobi on August 31, 2023. The global non-profit organisation working to end hunger and poverty in low- and middle-income countries awarded cash grants and scholarships to eight winners.

This year's winners were in two categories, namely ideation and product stage. In the product stage category, Eco Bristo won, taking home a cash prize of KSh1 million, followed

by Agritech Analytics as the first runner-up, receiving KSh400,000 and Grow Agric as the second runner-up bagging KSh200,000.

In the ideation stage category, VunaPay won a cash prize of KSh250,000 followed by Agronomy Plus, which received KSh150,000 and Silo Africa that took home KSh100,000. In addition, One Million Avocados and Agronomy Plus won a scholarship award from Astral Aerial.

Speaking during the awarding ceremony, Heifer Kenya Country Director Esta Kamau said this year's competition

had positive feedback from the competitors, partners and other organisations.

"The AYUte challenge is a catalyst for growth, combining a cash incentive with business development initiatives to translate the energy and ideas of young Kenyan innovators into solution providers working with smallholder farmers in Kenya," she said.

The organisation announced the second edition of the AYUte Africa Challenge Kenya last February.

The competition drew 222 applications countrywide, of which 122 innovators were selected and underwent a meticulous pitching, mentorship, training and incubation process.

Eventually, 21 innovations emerged as the finalists including ByteAnza, Eco Bristo, GrowAgric, One Million Avocados, Harvest Care, Sbike Limited, Touche Kami, Sulma Agri Value, Vunapay, Zamil Farms Limited, BnB Electrix, E-Poultry, Vermi- Farm Initiative, AgriTech Analytics, Agronomy Plus, Eco Starch, Farmer Lifeline, Kilimo Mitaani, Mwani Africa, Royal Food Industries and Silo Africa.

Themed 'Identify, Elevate, Grow Together: Propelling Agriculture Transformation Through Youth-Led Innovations', the event emphasised the need for collaboration among agriculture stakeholders to support the application of innovation and modern technologies in the sector.

Ms Kamau thanked partners such as E4Impact Entrepreneurship Centre, Mastercard's Community Pass, Astral Aerial, and Advanta Seeds, among others, noting their contribution demonstrated commitment to supporting game-changing innovations transforming agriculture using modern technologies.

"We are keen on trusted partnerships in identifying game-changing youth-led innovations, elevating them through market-driven training, mentorship and connections, and growing together for the benefit of smallholder farmers," she said.

The country director added that the future of Africa's agriculture hinges on creating opportunities for young innovators to propel agriculture transformation, catalyse ground-up innovation from young Africans and make agriculture a desired career for the future.

Livestock PS John Mueke, who was represented during the ceremony, in his remarks, thanked Heifer Kenya for recognising innovations, noting that the challenge not only empowers young innovators but also spurs agricultural solutions geared towards accelerating economic growth.

Heifer has partnered with E4Impact Entrepreneurship Centre to offer technical assistance to accelerate local innovation's growth and sustainability.

"Our critical role as E4Impact is to work with the innovators to shape their innovations through training,

mentoring, and linking them to various coaches, early-stage investors, and sector experts throughout the competition," said David Cheboryot, the Director of E4Impact Entrepreneurship Centre.

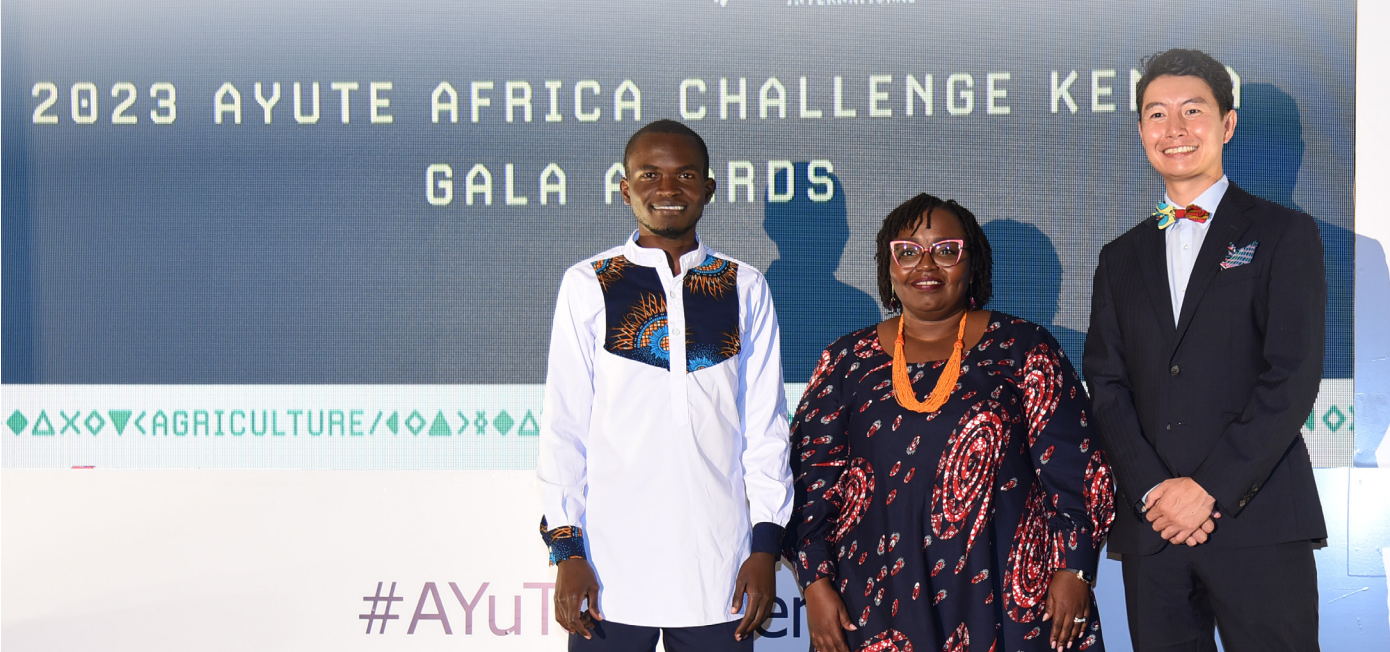
Dr Benadette Mutinda, the Country Director of E4Impact, said the entrepreneurship spirit among the youth in all sectors, especially in innovation is a game-changer for economic development.

Mutuma Muriuki, Founder of Eco Bristo, who bagged the Ksh1 million as the overall winner thanked Heifer International Kenya for the initiative.

"The announcement came as a surprise, but I want to appreciate Heifer for recognising me and the efforts Eco Bristo is putting towards enabling the growth of food systems through agroecology," he said.

The AYuTe Africa Challenge Kenya is the local chapter of the continent-wide AYuTe Africa Challenge and one of the most ambitious agriculture competitions on the continent, combining the power of youth with the many possibilities of emerging technologies to support smallholder farmers across Africa to grow their businesses and incomes.

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Mutuma Muriuki from Eco Bristo (left) and Koya Matsuno from VunaPay (right), the top winners of the AYuTe Africa Challenge Kenya 2023, pose for a photo with Country Director, Heifer Kenya, Esta Kamau.

Photo Credit: Heifer Kenya