

SONGHAI A RESOURCE CENTRE FOR AFRICA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Songhai is an international NGO based in Benin. The Songhai Centre is globally recognized for its leadership as an innovative and ecologically sustainable agri-enterprise. It has evolved an integrated value chain system organized in commercially viable clusters of agro-enterprises and developed a practically oriented training program for out of school graduates and youth in rural and peri-urban areas. The Songhai model adopts a holistic approach to agri-business and entrepreneurship development; which involves training, provision of support services, linkage to credit and market through networking of graduates from the training.

Following the requests from many African countries, Songhai and five UN agencies (FAO, IFAD, ILO, UNDP and UNIDO) have just established a joint program framework to implement agri-entrepreneurship development programs based on the Songhai model.

The partnership with Songhai as expressed through this regional program framework is aligned with UNDP and participating UN agency roles of working in a harmonized and coordinated manner to strengthen the capacity of Africa-based institutions and promote pro-poor growth strategies. Below are expected program results as discussed and endorsed by the participating countries:

- Songhai Centre capacity strengthened to serve as the Regional Centre of Excellence for Agri-business development to support national networks of agri-business entrepreneurs
- At least one agri-business and entrepreneurship development centre established in each participating country providing services in line with the Songhai model
- Viable agri-businesses established in participating countries to create employment along selected agri-value chains.
- Strengthened linkages between agri-business and entrepreneurship development centers and relevant institutions in participating countries to support national level activities.
- Improved business environment for SMEs facilitating proliferation of viable and sustainable small and medium scale agri-business in participating countries.

1. Background

Situation Analysis

Unemployment particularly amongst the youths is a major problem in Africa. This situation is reflecting negatively on the economy and leading to complex social problems and security. The problem of unemployment is exacerbated by the high population growth rate (2.6% per annum) that places further burden on African economies to produce adequate income earning opportunities if per capita incomes are not to fall. Although the magnitude of the constraint has now attracted the attention of African political leaders, sustainable approaches to addressing the root causes of the problem are still limited.

Average economic growth rate in African countries was estimated at 4% per annum during the last decade. Unfortunately, this growth did not impact significantly on poverty and unemployment levels. Also, the observed economic growth is below the estimated annual growth rate of 7% required for achieving the MDG1, of halving the number of the poor people

by 2015. Furthermore, it is concentrated in the traditionally capital intensive extractive sector, which has a very low labor absorptive capacity.

At the same time, agriculture, which employs an average of 65% of people in most African countries, is characterized by low productivity growth, and thus has not provided real employment and income security to the majority of the population, particularly in rural areas.

Significant opportunities for income generation and employment creation exist in the agricultural and rural sectors in several African countries. However, to translate these opportunities into reality, bold measures are required. In particular, targeted efforts are required to transform agricultural practices from a low productivity traditional system to high value integrated agro-enterprises. In transforming the sector, a new cadre of agri-entrepreneurs with new skills and global markets vision are also needed. Specifically, value addition, agro-industrial service sectors, trans-nationalization of agri-market and globalization present major opportunities for income and job creation along the value chain. However, these require a set of catalytic actions, key among them being (i) a broad-based political support, (ii) the development of a new cadre of the agri entrepreneurs to lead the transformation process, (iii), the development of new and efficient technologies and production techniques including their appropriation by a critical mass and (iv) the empowerment of the new entrepreneurs to be self-sustaining. The Songhai model incorporates the above elements in its entrepreneurship development and support program. Through this, the Songhai Centre has achieved notable success in agro-entrepreneurship development and the creation of decent rural employment along various agricultural commodity chains.

The Songhai model

The Songhai model is based on the interrelationship between environmental resources, agriculture, technology, services and industries. It also, explicitly incorporates a human capacity development component presented as an integrated package of technical, managerial, value based leadership and entrepreneurial skills development.

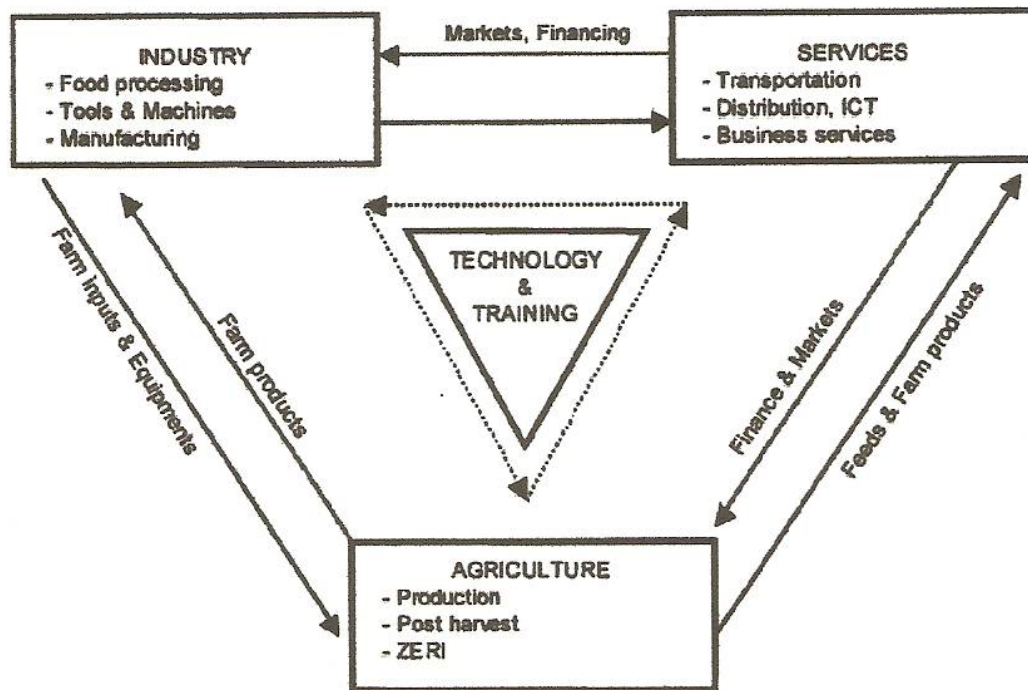
Operationally, the model promotes the use of local resources, hybridization of traditional and modern agricultural practices; adaptation of technologies and encourages diversification. Through these practices, Songhai operations integrate the zero waste and total productivity concepts by using biologically and ecologically sound agricultural practices. Thus, the Songhai model creates opportunities for rural communities to participate in the sustainable use and management of their local resources while promoting local economic development.

There are three integrated components to the Songhai development model:

- Agricultural centers involved in financially and environmentally sustainable production of primary and valued added products.
- Training of farmers as entrepreneurs and socio-economic leaders emphasizing zero waste and sustainable agricultural production, including pre and post harvesting techniques.
- Outreach to a community of trained farmer graduates who create clusters of agri-enterprises and manage their own farms, through a network that provides services and a route to markets.

A key Songhai principle is the inclusion and support to all willing and motivated youth, men and women in rural communities. This is based on the belief that successful economic and stable communities can only be developed in a holistic way, involving all members of a community as productive and valuable contributors.

The forward and backward linkages between the sectors within the Songhai model are depicted in the graph below.



In addition to responding to country requests, this joint program framework seeks to draw on practices and experiences such as the ones evolved by the Songhai Centre to address the following developmental challenges:

- Low productivity in agriculture, thus rendering the sector unprofitable and unattractive as a significant source of income.
- Fragmented initiatives mostly without a holistic approach, thus resulting in isolated, unsustainable and insignificant impacts.
- High post-harvest wastage due to limited scope for processing and preservation.
- Ill-prepared agricultural graduates with little or no practical knowledge or agri-business within regional and global market environments.
- Insufficient number of successful agri-entrepreneurs in local communities to serve as role models for inspiring youths to consider farming as a viable commercial / business venture.
- High unemployment especially among the youth.
- Inadequate institutional support to transform agriculture into a modern business oriented sector.

Why Songhai Model?

The Songhai Centre is recognized globally as one of Africa based institutions which have achieved notable success in addressing some of the problems listed above. The work of the Songhai Centre was recently highlighted during the South–South Cooperation conference by the South-South Cooperation Unit, which has been identifying and reviewing initiatives in the South worthy or being included in a pool of best practices for South-South Cooperation. The review exercise identified the Songhai Centre along with the New Economy/Self Sufficient

program promoted by the King of Thailand, as worthy of being scaled-up and leveraged to promote the South-South Cooperation.

On a regional level, in 1993, the founder and current Director of the Songhai Centre was awarded the African Prize Laureate for his vision and innovation.

The global and regional recognition of the work of the Songhai Centre along with requests from African governments serve as the basis for the UN System to work with all concerned partners in mapping out a strategy and examining implications for scaling up the Songhai model and ensuring that its services benefit the African region.

2. Strategic reasons for the Songhai-UN partnership

Goal

The overall goal of the program is to improve rural livelihoods, increase incomes and provide decent employment opportunities for youths and the unemployed through interventions that stimulate investment in sustainable agri-enterprise development, and create incentives for private sector engagement.

Objective

To promote access of youth, men and women to appropriate agri-entrepreneurial, leadership and management skills required for their effective participation in the creation of and investments in commercially viable agro-enterprises in selected African countries.

Immediate objectives

The program seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Support the establishment of a Regional Centre of excellence for Agri-business development through strengthening the capacity of Songhai Centre
- Strengthen relevant national institutions in each participating country to serve as the national centre for agri-entrepreneurship development within the framework of the Songhai model
- Strengthen the capacity of service providers (NGOs, CBOs, networks, business and related associations) to enable operating agri-enterprises to efficiently access information, resources, inputs and markets
- Facilitate decent employment opportunities along selected agri-value chains and through agro-industrial processing and services while promoting environmentally sustainable management of organic waste /by-production for use as renewable energy resources.