



## PAFO-COLEAD INNOVATIONS SERIES:

Innovations and successes of African farmer-led businesses and SMEs

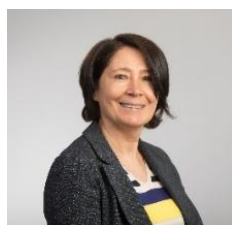
### SESSION N°24

Innovation and technology adoption by entrepreneurs

Tuesday 9 Septembre 2025 - 12:00-14:00 UTC

### BIODATA OF THE SPEAKERS

#### ISOLINA BOTO – HEAD OF NETWORKS AND ALLIANCES, COLEAD



Isolina Boto is the Head of Networks and Alliances at COLEAD, a non-profit Association of private sector operators in the agrifood sector active in the EU, Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) regions. Isolina has more than 25 years of experience in agricultural development. She started her career with the European Commission and has also worked with various ACP embassies and NGOs in areas related to food security, rural development and trade. Before joining COLEAD, she was the Manager of the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation ACP-EU (CTA) Brussels Office (2004-2020) implementing policy initiatives related to the ACP-EU cooperation in the field of agricultural and rural development. She has led agribusiness projects in support of capacity development of SMEs, entrepreneurs and farmers organisations across Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

#### BETHEHEM DEJENE, CEO ZAFREE PAPERS



Bethelhem Dejene is the Founder & CEO of Zafree Papers, a clean-tech company transforming agricultural waste into 100% tree-free paper products, reducing deforestation while creating value for over 8,000 smallholder farmers. An Economics graduate from Addis Ababa University, she has successfully expanded her venture from Ethiopia to Zambia with plans for wider African scale-up. Recognized as Founder of the Year at the Global Startup Awards Africa 2024 and a Tony Elumelu Foundation–UNDP Programme alumna, Bethelhem combines innovation, sustainability, and inclusive business models to drive impact in agrifood value chains. Her leadership and vision position her at the



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forefront of eco-innovation, earning her recognition in global platforms such as the Sustainable Packaging Summit 2025.

#### **NATHANIEL EDJEBA, BUSINESS COACH SOILLESS FARM LAB**



Nathaniel Edjeba is an agricultural professional with strong expertise in agribusiness, project management, and farm operations. He holds a Bachelor of Agriculture in Agricultural Economics (University of Benin) and an Agribusiness Certification from Wageningen University and has led impactful initiatives empowering farmers and young entrepreneurs. As Project Supervisor with the British American Tobacco Nigeria Foundation, he supported over 400 rural farmers through climate-smart agriculture training that improved yields by 80%, while also establishing demonstration sites to promote innovation. He has co-trained more than 4,000 youths annually in greenhouse farming with EYiA, facilitated the deployment of 320 greenhouses per year, and currently serves as a Business Coach at Soilless Farmlab, mentoring over 70 agribusinesses and supporting innovative financing models such as cluster fish farming. Nathaniel also played a key role in securing ISO 22000, HACCP, and Halal certifications, enhancing food safety standards and opening export opportunities, underscoring his dedication to driving innovation, sustainability, and excellence in African agriculture.

#### **JEREMY KNOPS – DELEGUE GENERAL, COLEAD**



Jeremy est titulaire d'un master en ingénierie commerciale de l'École d'économie et de gestion Solvay de Bruxelles (SBS-EM), en Belgique. Avant de rejoindre le COLEAD en 2009, il participait aux opérations quotidiennes d'une coopérative d'agriculteurs au Guatemala qui exporte des nêfles du Japon vers l'UE et les États-Unis. Jeremy a commencé à travailler pour le COLEAD en tant qu'expert responsable des normes privées et de la certification pour les producteurs et les exportateurs de fruits et légumes des pays ACP. Il a été nommé délégué général du COLEAD en juin 2019. Jeremy est un coach accrédité pour le leadership et le développement professionnel.

#### **STEVE HODA, CO-FOUNDER AFRICEREAL GROUP SARL**



Steve HODA, a visionary in agricultural development in Africa, is the CEO of AfriCereal Group, a pioneering company revolutionizing agriculture through technology, mechanization, and training. For over ten years, he has dedicated his expertise to improving farmers' livelihoods and professionalizing agricultural practices with innovative solutions. Under his leadership, AfriCereal launched IKENA, a multiservice platform positioned as a phygital one-stop shop, connecting, equipping, and supporting producers, cooperatives, and agribusinesses for greater efficiency and sustainability. Beyond economic impact, Steve demonstrates strong social commitment as President of Acting for a Smile Benin, an NGO that operationalizes AfriCereal Group's CSR policy by supporting rural communities, particularly vulnerable groups and children of farmers. Vision, innovation, and solidarity define his journey.

## **OUSMANE NDIAYE, ACTING DIRECTOR GENERAL OF AFRICAN CENTER OF METEOROLOGICAL APPLICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT (ACMAD)**



Dr. Ousmane Ndiaye is the Acting Director General of the African Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development (ACMAD). Based in Niamey, Niger, ACMAD is a regional climate body serving 53 African nations. He assumed this leadership role in December 2024 after serving as Director of Meteorological Operations at Senegal's ANACIM. Holding a PhD and Master's from Columbia University in New York, Dr. Ndiaye is a seasoned expert in climate prediction and its practical application. He has led the development of district-level working groups in Senegal to translate climate data into actionable services for farmers and fishers via rural radio, mobile messaging, and social media, and coordinated implementation of heat-wave early warning systems across West Africa [acmad.org](http://acmad.org). He served as national focal point for the IPCC and contributed to its 6th Assessment Report (Working Group I), and is a board member of the Global Heat Health Information Network (GHHIN)

## **SAMUEL RIGU, FOUNDER, SAFI ORGANICS LTD**



As a visionary leader, Samuel Rigu is on a mission to transform the agribusiness industry in Kenya and beyond. Samuel's passion for environmental conservation, coupled with his entrepreneurial spirit, has led him to develop innovative solutions that address critical issues faced by rural farmers. Growing up in rural Kenya, Samuel witnessed firsthand the struggles of farmers, including his grandmother and neighbors, to access affordable, high-yield fertilizers. He resolved to solve this problem by founding Safi Organics in 2015, a technology-driven company that converts farmers' crop waste into high-quality organic fertilizers. Today, Samuel serves as the Chief Executive Officer of Safi Organics, working full-time to manage the company's operations and expand its customer base. With over 12 years of hands-on experience in management and entrepreneurship, Samuel brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the table, including a deep understanding of the African entrepreneurial ecosystem. In addition to founding Safi Organics, Samuel previously co-founded a successful company that sold over one million mosquito coils to a large distributor in Kenya. He also worked as the Country Director for Takachar and implemented various organic practices at the Turning Point Trust Farm, turning its finances from loss to profit in just six months. Samuel's dedication to achieving results in agribusiness management, entrepreneurship, and environmental conservation has never wavered. He continues to drive Safi Organics forward, with the vision of creating a world where agriculture is free from waste. If you're looking for an experienced, passionate, and results-driven agribusiness manager and entrepreneur, look no further than Samuel Rigu."

#### **DR. BABAFEMI OYEWOLE – CEO, PAFO**



Dr. Babafemi Oyewole, the CEO of Pan African Farmers Organization (PAFO), is a tri-sector executive and professional with experiences in the public, private and non-government sectors, and a veteran in the management of international institutions. Prior to his appointment at PAFO, he was the CEO of the African Agribusiness Alliance; former CEO of African Cashew Alliance; former Executive Director/CEO of African Energy Investment Corporation (AEICORP); Deputy Secretary General of the West African Bankers Association (WABA); General Manager, Banque Internationale du Benin, and Senior Economist with the Bank of Industry, Nigeria. He was a Regional Consultant on natural resources management policy in African countries with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). He is a member of Africa Regional Experts on Policy Dialogue on Natural Resource-based Development at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Dr. Oyewole was a Chevening Scholar for his PhD in development economics at the university of Bradford, United Kingdom, and obtained an MBA in Technology, Marketing and Business Strategy from Olabisi Onabanjo University, Nigeria. He has attended several management and executive development programmes in top universities including Lagos Business School, Nigeria, and Harvard university, United States. He has published articles in international journals and made conference presentations on development policy, banking and finance, agriculture, agribusiness, and sustainable development issues.

#### **DANIEL KYALO WILLY, SNR. MANAGER, AGROBUSINESS, POLICY AND COMMERCIALIZATION, AATF**



Dr. Daniel Kyalo Willy is the Senior Manager for Policy, Agribusiness and Commercialization at the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), where he plays a central role in driving agricultural transformation across sub-Saharan Africa through technology deployment, commercialization, and policy reform. An Agricultural Economist with over 15 years of experience, he has worked extensively on value chain development and enabling environments for technology adoption, including leading the TAAT Policy Enabler Programme. He holds a BSc and MSc in Agricultural Economics from Egerton University and a PhD in Agricultural and Resource Economics from the University of Bonn, and has published widely on African agricultural transformation. Before joining AATF, Dr. Willy lectured in the Department of Agricultural Economics at Kenyatta University and consulted for institutions such as the National Research Fund (Kenya), Solidaridad, BOKU Austria, and Michigan State University. In addition to his role at AATF, he serves as Interim Managing Director of Agridrive Ltd., overseeing innovative mechanization aggregation models in Nigeria that have significantly improved farmers' productivity and incomes.

## AHOEFA SOKLOU, PROJECT OFFICER, COLEAD



Ahoefa Immaculée Soklou is a Project Officer at COLEAD, where she designs and implements programmes that promote entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainability in the agrifood sector across the global south countries. She holds a master's in development studies from Senghor University, Egypt, and a bachelor's in economics from the University of Kara, Togo. Ahoefa has extensive experience coordinating high-impact leadership and entrepreneurship initiatives, supporting participants in skills and capacities development, expanding business opportunities, and fostering inclusive economic growth. Before joining COLEAD, she led a large-scale digital and entrepreneurship capacity-building programme for 1,200 women entrepreneurs, primarily in agrifood, in collaboration with national and international partners. Passionate about inclusive economic opportunities, women's empowerment, and resilient food systems, she is committed to creating impactful programmes that enable local communities to thrive.



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