



Session n°26

Financing African Agrifood Entrepreneurs: Strategies to access investment

Tuesday 24 March 2026

## HIGHLIGHTS

### About the PAFO-COLEAD Innovations Series

Launched in November 2020 by the Pan-African Farmers' Organization (PAFO) and COLEAD, the Innovations Series highlights successful African agrifood SMEs and promotes knowledge exchange among entrepreneurs, researchers, policymakers, financiers, and farmer organisations.

Session n°26, held on the 24 March 2026, brought together entrepreneurs, investors, and technical assistance providers to share practical insights on improving access to finance for agrifood SMEs. The session attracted strong interest, with 419 registrants seeking resources, and opportunities to engage with key actors in the sector.

All information about the session is available on [Agrinnovators](#) entrepreneur's platform.

Recording of the session: [Link](#)

### Access to finance for agrifood entrepreneurs in Africa

Access to finance remains a key constraint for agrifood SMEs, largely due to gaps in investment readiness, including weak financial structuring and limited alignment with investor expectations. While opportunities such as impact investment and blended finance are growing, accessing them requires stronger preparation and better connections between entrepreneurs and investors.

### Key points discussed

#### *Aligning businesses with financing requirements*

The main challenge is not the lack of funding, but the difficulty for entrepreneurs to understand and meet financing requirements. Many businesses struggle due to limited knowledge of funding mechanisms and insufficient preparation. Investing in readiness programmes, understanding funding systems, and starting with smaller financing opportunities before scaling up are key steps to access investment.

#### *What makes businesses attractive to investors*

Beyond innovation, investors emphasised the importance of financial discipline, clear results, and compliance with standards. Entrepreneurs must demonstrate how funds are used and build credibility over time. Formalisation, product quality, certification, and the ability to meet market requirements particularly for export markets were highlighted as essential. In addition, investors increasingly require companies to meet environmental and social (E&S) standards, demonstrate measurable impact through clear KPIs, and have the capacity to report on sustainability performance, as ESG considerations are now embedded in investment and due diligence processes.

#### *Entrepreneurial strategies to access finance*

Entrepreneurs highlighted the importance of adopting a pragmatic approach to financing. This includes starting with smaller funding opportunities such as grants, testing solutions, and learning through experience rather than waiting for large investments. Conducting needs assessments, understanding market demand,



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listening to customer feedback, and continuously analysing the business environment were also identified as key to strengthening business positioning.

### *The role of technical assistance and support programmes*

Technical assistance was identified as a critical lever to strengthen entrepreneurs' capacity to access finance. Beyond direct funding, programmes such as those offered by EDFI and COLEAD provide mentorship, support for certification and compliance, and help businesses better understand investor requirements. Participating in programmes that do not provide immediate funding can still play an important role in improving readiness and unlocking future opportunities.

### *The importance of ecosystems, partnerships and diversification*

Access to finance is strongly influenced by the surrounding ecosystem. Partnerships, business networks, and platforms help entrepreneurs access information, opportunities, and support. Diversifying funding sources, including self-financing and credit, was also highlighted as important to reduce risks. In addition, engaging women and youth, strengthening visibility, and using appropriate technologies can further enhance business attractiveness and access to opportunities.

## Meet the businesses and entrepreneurs



**Jovia Kisaakye**  
Founder & CEO,  
Ecobed Biotech Brand,  
Uganda



**Joel Degboe**  
Chief Financial  
Officer, Cajou Espoir,  
Togo

### **Jovia Kisaakye, Founder & CEO, Ecobed Biotech Brand, Uganda**

Jovia Kisaakye is a Ugandan social entrepreneur and Founder of Ecobed Biotech, focused on transforming agricultural waste into high-impact products. *Jovia mentioned that accessing finance is a progressive process that starts with building proof through action. She emphasised the importance of starting small, testing solutions, and demonstrating results to build credibility over time. Her experience showed that visibility, networks, and participation in programmes can open doors, but what ultimately matters is the ability to show concrete impact and traction.*

### **Joel Degboe, Chief Financial Officer, Cajou Espoir, Togo**

Joel Degboe is a finance professional specialised in agribusiness, currently serving as CFO of Cajou Espoir. *Joel emphasised that access to finance depends on financial discipline and structure. He highlighted the importance of having clear financial data, organised systems, and the ability to track performance. His experience showed that investors are more likely to support businesses that can show where their money goes and prove that it delivers results over time.*

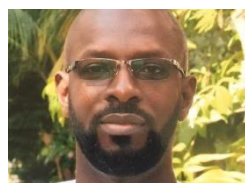
## Meet the organisations supporting businesses



**Natalia Svarinska**  
Head of Technical  
Assistance, EDFI  
Management  
Company



**Bocar Alpha BA**  
Country Manager,  
Invest in Africa  
Mauritania



**Iba Fall**  
Country Director,  
Invest in Africa  
Senegal



**Perrine Duffaure**  
AgriFI Investment  
Officer, EDFI  
Management  
Company



**Weiting Yao**  
Program Manager,  
COLEAD

EDFI Management Company, represented by Natalia Svarinska, Head of Technical Assistance

EDFI MC acts as a catalyst investor, supporting companies to grow and reach a stage where they can access financing from Development Finance Institutions and commercial investors.

*Natalia highlighted that many SMEs miss financing opportunities not because of weak potential, but because they are not sufficiently prepared to meet investor requirements. She emphasised that technical assistance plays a critical role in helping businesses structure their financial management, strengthen governance, and prepare for due diligence. Her intervention underscored that investment readiness is not a one-time step, but a progressive process that must be aligned with the maturity of the business.*

Invest In Africa, represented by Bocar Alpha BA Country Manager Mauritania and Iba Fall, Country Director Senegal

Invest in Africa supports SMEs by improving access to markets, finance, and business opportunities. It connects entrepreneurs to networks, investors, and platforms for growth.

*In their presentation, Bocar and Iba highlighted that many entrepreneurs struggle to access finance sometimes because they are not connected to the right networks and entry points. They emphasised that access to finance is closely linked to how well SMEs are positioned within ecosystems and value chains. Strengthening partnerships, engaging with platforms, and improving visibility were identified as key to helping businesses connect with investors and access available opportunities.*

AgriFI by EDFI MC, represented by Perrine Duffaure, AgriFI Investment Officer

AgriFI is an EU blending instrument investing in sustainable agriculture projects with strong impact on smallholders, supporting agrifood enterprises to access finance and scale.

*Perrine provided a practical perspective on investor decision-making, highlighting that many SMEs are filtered out early due to weak financial data, unclear strategies, or lack of preparation. She stressed that beyond business potential, investors need visibility and consistency and expect entrepreneurs to anticipate due diligence requirements. Her intervention highlighted that access to finance depends on the ability to present a business that is already structured and ready to engage with investors.*

COLEAD, represented by Weiting Yao, Project Manager in Access to Finance

COLEAD 's Access to Finance Department supports agrifood MSMEs by strengthening their investment readiness and linking them to finance opportunities across Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. *Weiting highlighted that beyond common misconceptions, investors are primarily looking for clarity and credibility in a business, including a well-defined model, coherent strategy, and reliable financial projections. She presented COLEAD's investment readiness pathway as a structured approach to help entrepreneurs progressively strengthen these elements. Her key message was that with the right preparation, entrepreneurs can shift from seeking funding to presenting a clear and credible investment opportunity.*

## Resources

### 1. Reports and Studies

ISF Advisors, 2023, [The State of the Sector: Agri-SME Finance 2023](#)

OECD, 2018, [OECD DAC Blended Finance Principles: For Unlocking Commercial Finance for the Sustainable Development Goals. Best Practices in Development Co-operation](#)

OECD, 2021, [Making blended finance work for agri-smes: lessons learned from selected case studies](#)

IFAD, [Smallholder and Agri-SME Finance and Investment Network](#)

EDFI, [AgriFI Investment Strategy and Approach](#)

World Bank, 2024, [Food Systems Financing and SME Development](#)

IFAD – SAFIN, <https://www.ifad.org/en/safin>

FAO, 2011, [Financing Agricultural Value Chains in Africa - A Synthesis of Four Country Case Studies](#)

### 2. Trainings and other opportunities

COLEAD, 2025, [Investment Readiness pathway webinars](#)

EDFI Management Company, [Apply for Investment](#)

RFILC, [Rural Finance & Investment Learning Centre](#)

FAO, 2024, [Sustainable Development Goals Helpdesk](#)

African Management Institute, [Powering the growth of Africa's ambitious companies & talent.](#)

FMO, Dutch Entrepreneurial Development Bank), [Investment Readiness Support and SME Financing Programmes](#)

COLEAD e-learning platform: <https://training.colead.link/>

Agriinnovators, [Access to finance Forum](#)

#### Coordination team for these series:

**PAFO:** Babafemi Oyewole - Chief Executive Officer, Aimable Twagirayezu - Programs Officer, Seneza Schadrack - M&E Officer

**COLEAD:** Ahoefa Soklou – Project Officer, Nina Desanlis-Perrin – Project Officer, Networks and Alliances



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