



## SESSION N°26

### Financing African Agrifood Entrepreneurs: Strategies to access investment

Tuesday 24 March 2026 - 12:00-13 :45 UTC

Online ([Zoom](#))

*English-French-Portuguese interpretation available*

#### 1. Context

Access to finance remains one of the main constraints facing agrifood entrepreneurs in Africa. While agrifood SMEs play a critical role in strengthening food systems, creating rural employment and adding value to agricultural products, many struggle to secure the capital needed to grow. Around 220,000 agrifood SMEs in Sub-Saharan Africa require external financing, yet much of this demand remains unmet due to limited financial products adapted to the sector and gaps in investment readiness.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond the availability of capital, investors often report difficulties identifying investment-ready enterprises capable of meeting due-diligence requirements and managing external investment effectively. Strengthening business planning, financial management and governance is therefore a key step for entrepreneurs seeking to attract funding.<sup>2</sup>

This session will explore how agrifood entrepreneurs can strengthen their investment readiness, navigate financing opportunities, and leverage technical assistance to access capital.

#### 2. Opportunities and pathways for agrifood entrepreneurs

Despite persistent financing constraints, the landscape for agrifood investment in Africa is evolving. Impact investors, development finance institutions and specialised funds are increasingly interested in agrifood enterprises that contribute to food security, climate resilience and rural development.

At the same time, innovative financing models are expanding. Blended finance, which combines concessional and private capital, is increasingly used to reduce investment risks in agriculture.<sup>3</sup> Value-chain financing is also enabling agrifood SMEs to access credit through partnerships with buyers, processors, or input suppliers, while digital financial services and

<sup>1</sup> ISF Advisors, 2022, [State of the Sector- Agri-SME Finance](#)

<sup>2</sup> IFAD, [Smallholder and Agri-SME Finance and Investment Network](#)

<sup>3</sup> OECD, 2021, [Making blended finance work for agri-smes: lessons learned from selected case studies](#)



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fintech solutions are improving credit assessment through alternative data such as mobile transactions or supply-chain records.

However, accessing these opportunities requires entrepreneurs to understand investor expectations and prepare their businesses accordingly.

### 3. Persistent challenges to accessing finance

Several structural barriers continue to limit access to finance for agrifood SMEs. One widely recognised issue is the “missing middle” in agricultural finance. Many agrifood enterprises are too large for microfinance institutions but too small or too risky for commercial banks. As a result, a significant share of financing demand remains unmet.<sup>4</sup>

Entrepreneurs also often face investment readiness challenges, including limited financial records, weak governance structures and insufficient market data. These gaps can make it difficult for investors to assess risks and evaluate the growth potential of agrifood businesses. Women and youth entrepreneurs may face additional barriers related to access to land, collateral and financial networks<sup>5</sup>.

Beyond the availability of capital, the challenge therefore lies in connecting viable agrifood enterprises with appropriate financing mechanisms.

### 4. Way forward

Improving access to finance for agrifood entrepreneurs requires stronger collaboration between entrepreneurs, investors and support organisations. Investment readiness programmes, technical assistance and mentorship can help SMEs strengthen financial management and prepare proposals that meet investor expectations.<sup>6</sup>

Financial institutions also need to develop financing products better adapted to agrifood SMEs, including repayment structures aligned with agricultural production cycles. Strengthening connections between entrepreneurs, farmer organisations, investors and technical assistance providers will be key to building stronger pipelines of investable agrifood enterprises.

This session will explore:

- The main barriers limiting agrifood entrepreneurs’ access to finance
- What investment readiness means in practice for agrifood SMEs
- Emerging financing models and instruments for agrifood businesses in Africa
- How entrepreneurs can better connect with investors and funding opportunities

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<sup>4</sup> ISF Advisors, 2022, [State of the Sector: Agri-SME Finance](#)

<sup>5</sup> World Bank, 2024, [Food Systems Financing and SME Development](https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/agriculture)

<sup>6</sup> IFAD – SAFIN, <https://www.ifad.org/en/safin>

**PAFO-COLEAD INNOVATIONS SERIES:**  
Innovations and successes of African farmer-led businesses and SMEs

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**Agenda**

- **Moderator:** Ahoefa Soklou, Project officer, Networks and Alliances, COLEAD

**12:00-12:10 Introduction**

- Ines Bastos, Senior Expert Business Development, COLEAD
- Babafemi Oyewole, CEO, PAFO

**12:10-12:40 Panel 1: Agrifood entrepreneurs accessing and mobilising finance in Africa**

- Steve Ndende, Founder Agrizoom, Republic of Congo
- Jovia Kisaakye, Founder & CEO CEO, Ecobed Biotech Brand, Uganda
- Joel Degboe, Chief Financial Officer, Cajou Espoir, Togo

**12:40-13:15 Panel 2: Catalyzing Impact Investment in Africa's Agrifood Sector  
Empowering SMEs for Investment: the role of Technical Assistance**

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

**Investor Perspectives: Expectations, Opportunities, and Financing Trends**

- Bocar-Alpha BA, Country Manager Mauritania, Invest in Africa
- IBA Fall, Country Director Senegal, Invest in Africa
- Perrine Duffaure, AgriFI Investment Officer, EDFI Management Company

**13:15-13:30 Debate**

**13:30-13:40 Key takeaways and conclusion**

**13:40-13:45 COLEAD' Investment readiness Pathway**

- Weiting YAO, Project Manager Access to Finance, COLEAD



*This event was organised by the Fit For Market Plus (FFM+) programme, implemented by COLEAD within the framework of development cooperation between the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) and the European Union (EU)*

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