

START-UP**Digifarms Africa****Providing Agric Products At Door-steps of Consumers**

The start-up is leveraging on the internet to bridge the gap between farmers and consumers of agricultural products, hence reducing post-harvest losses.

Roland MBONTEH

The advent of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) has affected every sector of the economy. Agriculture which is the mainstay of most economies in Africa is getting its fair share of this revolution. Today, with just a click, farmers just like consumers can easily get desired information about market prices and availability of farm produce. One of such start-ups that is breaking grounds in the digitization of agricultural marketing is Digifarms Africa. It is an innovative agribusiness enterprise providing door-to-door delivery of agricultural products and farm produce. "We are a tech driven enterprise with a mission of ensuring food self-sufficiency for every African citizen, the founder of Digifarms Africa, Che Azenyui Bruno said.

The flagship products marketed online via the start-ups website and its social media accounts include yam, rice, maize, beans, cassava, garri, plantain and soya beans. "Our research and expansion team is also exploring possibilities of adding other commodities to our list of trading items and all our customers get notified via our website digifarmafrica.com whenever new products are introduced to our list of trading commodities," he stated while announcing that Made-in Cameroon rice (Ndop rice) will as from November this year be marketed by the platform following a partnership agreement with the Upper Noun Valley Development Authority (UNVDA). Digifarms Africa buys agricultural produce directly from the farms and transport to their warehouses (Market Centre) where they are packaged and marketed online. Consumers place their orders online and they are

25

The number of hotels and restaurants served weekly.

served where they are. Though an average citizen can buy because of the affordability, the founder stated that their big customers are hotels and restaurants. The Buea-based start-up is currently serving some 25 hotels and restaurants weekly from its 8 proximity warehouses. "I think what sets Digifarms Africa apart from probably every other agribusiness venture is our heavy leverage on technology and the digital economy as a tool to jumpstart transformation in Africa. Our door-to-door approach to customer service is also an initiative that has given Digifarms Africa recognition and appreciation all over the continent," he adds. With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the door-to-door delivery service is not only to ensure customer satisfaction but also protects their customers from the crowded physical markets that are proving to be the fastest transmission ground.

INSTANTANE**"Every Product Is Marketed With Added Value"**

Che Azenyui Bruno, Founder of Digifarms Africa.

Since January 2020 you started an online platform to market agricultural produce and products to consumers. What motivated this initiative?

When I set out to create Digifarms Africa in 2018, the biggest question that I wanted to answer on the continent was the question of food security, it was the question of post-harvest crop preservation and the question of agricultural productivity in the continent. I wanted to provide answers to the perennial question as to why Africa still records alarming rates of post-harvest crop loss despite all the investment in agricultural production in the continent and especially when you take into consideration the huge proportion of the continent's population that still finds it difficult to guarantee three square meals a day and so I set forth to establish an enterprise that can serve as a bridge between Africa's ever growing farming population and the huge market for agricultural products available all over the continent; a bridge which has over the years remained broken by the deplorable state of farm to market roads, increasing challenges for farmers caused by climate change, inadequate production capital



Che A. Bruno "...a bridge between Africa's ever growing farming population and the huge market for agricultural products."

for farmers and the farmer's slow adaptation to modern methods of agricultural product marketing. And so, it dawned on me that I could leverage my own experience to re-brand agriculture in Africa, provide a platform for easier market access to agricultural producers, create green jobs for African youths and generate revenue for farmers all over the continent.

What is the added value Digifarms Africa brings to these products?

Firstly, our farmer selection at Digifarms gives priority to farmers with a verified track record of improved quality crop production and constant willingness to innovate and add value to their products. We are also working with a team of agricultural value chain developers who support Digifarms Africa in terms of product selection, value addition, processing, packaging and safe delivery. Since the registration of Digifarms Africa in January 2020, we have recorded 100 per cent customer satisfaction and our money-back policy for dissatisfied clients is proof of our conviction in our product quality. Every product that gets to Digifarms Africa is marketed with added value, value in terms of proper packaging, value in terms of our ability to do sorting and healthy crop selection and value in terms of processing. That is why we are investing heavily in value chain development be it for products like rice, beans, cassava and plantains or even just maize, garri, and yam.

How does Digifarms Africa relate with the farmers who are the main producers?

The Digifarms Suppliers or Digifarmers as we call them are the pillars of Digifarms Africa. Right now, we have a network of about 50 Digifarmers in the North West, South West, Littoral and Northern Regions of Cameroon who constitute the network of Digifarms Suppliers. We have set up as of now eight proximity warehouses close to these farmers and we have proximity warehouse managers who buy these products from the farmers when they are available and we transport these products to our market centres for onward delivery to the customers. The advantage these farmers now have is that by buying these products directly from the farms, we relieve the farmers of the burden of post-harvest losses caused in some cases by poor transportation methods from the farms to the urban markets around the country. We are currently setting up a farmer's support scheme through which we will provide interest free loans to farmers and farming groups in the continent during the planting season and then they pay back in the form of agricultural products during the harvest season.

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INNOVATIONS**Innovations technologiques****On prépare le 8^e Salon africain**

Le 8^e Salon africain de l'invention et de l'innovation technologique se tiendra à Brazzaville du 10 au 13 septembre prochain. Pour garantir le succès de cette rencontre, l'Organisation africaine de la propriété intellectuelle (OAPI) est en quête d'un spécialiste en événementiel. Cotonou, la capitale béninoise, a accueilli la précédente édition organisée sur le thème : « l'invention, moteur du développement industriel ». L'Institut de recherche médicale et d'études de plantes médicinales (IMPM) avait alors remporté le prix de la meilleure invention issue de la pharmacopée traditionnelle, grâce à la pommade antibactérienne « Tabercine ».

Accès aux soins de santé**La solution IDocta contre les déserts médicaux**

Alors que le Cameroun a franchi la barre des 12500 cas de contamination au nouveau coronavirus, la fréquentation des hôpitaux pour les autres pathologies est en baisse. Yannick Mbarga, pharmacien, apporte une solution avec l'application IDocta. La plateforme regroupe plus de 200 médecins généralistes et spécialistes et permet à ses utilisateurs d'avoir accès à des soins de santé à distance. Les visites à domicile sont également possibles. Le patient devra alors déboursier neuf dollars, soit environ 5260 F C. Pour éviter une contamination des patients au covid-19, le créateur de l'application rassure que les spécialistes de la plateforme sont régulièrement testés. Les médecins déclarés positifs au covid-19 sont alors retirés de la plateforme, le temps de se faire soigner.

Consommation d'électricité**Un compteur intelligent mis sur pied**

La start-up camerounaise Ndoto Sarl vient de développer une solution de gestion et de contrôle de la consommation d'énergie électrique. Après cinq ans de recherche, leur compteur intelligent est né. Outre le contrôle de la consommation d'énergie grâce aux fonctions d'activation et de désactivation du compteur à distance, l'invention permet aussi de réduire les coûts liés à la distribution de l'énergie. Pour les consommateurs, un autre avantage réside dans les facilités de paiement des factures offertes via des plateformes de paiement mobile. Un système d'alerte avant toute interruption du service est également proposé.