

Digifarms Africa First Interview with Cameroonian Press After Completion of TEF-UNDP Entrepreneurship Program

For the first time since Completion of the TEF-UNDP entrepreneurship program of the Tony Elumelu Foundation, we received in our office a team of Cameroonian journalists who came seeking to get insights into our work and the value we create at Digifarms Africa. Our two-hour exchange with these media practitioners resulted in an exclusive interview published by some of the country's leading Print media platforms. Below are excerpts of that One-on-One interview granted on the 18th of June 202 in Buea by Digifarms Africa founder Che Azenyui Bruno

PRESS: *Since early this year you created an online platform to market agricultural produce and products to consumers. What motivated this initiative?*

Bruno: Digifarms Africa is a digital agribusiness enterprise that incorporates innovations in technology for the cultivation, processing and marketing of agricultural products and farm produce. We are a tech-driven agribusiness enterprise with a mission of ensuring food self-sufficiency for every African citizen.

Now 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 for farmers and the farmer's slow adaptation to modern methods of agricultural product marketing. As a trained media practitioner and with my deep passion for technology, It dawned on me that I could leverage my own experience as a Journalist, Media Relations Practitioner and my years of experience in corporate branding, marketing and Advertising to rebrand 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.

PRESS: *How is Digifarms Africa different from other platforms offering similar services?*

Bruno: I think what sets Digifarms Africa apart from probably every other agribusiness venture in the continent today is firstly is our heavy leverage on technology and the digital economy as a tool to jump-start transformation in Africa. We believe in the power of technology and the internet of things to accelerate growth and transformation in Africa and that has greatly given us a comparative market advantage in the continent. Our door-to-door approach to customer service is

also an initiative that has given Digifarms Africa recognition and appreciation all over the continent. We are also carving a niche for ourselves at Digifarms Africa in terms of our unique branding, packaging and marketing service offered to farmers and consumers in the continent. We also strongly believe that our youthfulness in terms of staff strength, our drive, our ambition and our determination to serve are also some of the factors that have given Digifarms Africa an edge in the agribusiness industry today. Almost all members of the Digifarms team are within the 15-45 age range and this gives us an assuring promise of a future and the guarantee of long-term sustainability. But most importantly, I believe the biggest factor that defines our uniqueness at Digifarms Africa is not just the internet or our ability overcome financial challenges in business. But rather our belief in PEOPLE. We believe in PEOPLE and we hold at Digifarms Africa that PEOPLE and their aspirations are the biggest factor that drives us in business. If you ask me about what sets Digifarms Africa apart from other agribusiness enterprises in continent today, I will tell you it is our belief in PEOPLE and our conviction that their dreams and desires in life matter. We exist at Digifarms primarily to meet the needs of PEOPLE. To support them in overcoming their daily challenges and to accompany them in their quest to bring their dreams alive. That's why we have never forgotten the fact that at Digifarms we are more than just an agribusiness enterprise. We are a community of PEOPLE. The Digifarms Community; our continental network of farmers, students, scholars, researchers and agricultural think tanks is just the first demonstration of our belief in PEOPLE and this has greatly contributed to giving Digifarms Africa a name probably above every other on the African continent.

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

Bruno: 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% customer satisfaction and our money back policy for dissatisfied clients is proof of our conviction in our product quality. Just to indicate that we have since our creation recorded zero money back claim from any of our customers. Every product

PRESS: *One of your flagship services is door-to-door delivery. How does this affect the prices of these commodities?*

Bruno: Digifarms Africa is not just an enterprise. What defines us at Digifarms is the social aspect of that name and not just the enterprise part of it. We believe in sustainability and the role that profit plays in ensuring sustainability for an enterprise. However, as a social enterprise we are more concerned about the value we create than maximizing profits and our door-to-door delivery is just a measure aimed at adding value to the products we provide at Digifarms Africa. Our product prices are probably the most affordable around and we ensure that our door-to-door delivery does not affect the comparative cost of product acquisition negatively. Other cost like packaging and

handling, are borne entirely by Digifarms Africa and we gladly sacrifice a considerable percentage of our profits to guarantee maximum satisfaction to our customers. If anything, our door-to-door delivery service only adds value to the services we render at Digifarms Africa. We introduced the door-to-door delivery service because of our belief in customer satisfaction at Digifarms Africa and we also believe that our door-to-door delivery service protects our customers from the crowded physical markets that are proving to be the fastest transmission ground for COVID-19 and other diseases. We sell our products at virtually the same price that the products sell in the everyday market.

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

Bruno: The Digifarms Suppliers or Digifarmers as we call them are the pillars of Digifarms Africa. They are the mainstay of our activities. They play a crucial role in defining the value we create at Digifarms. 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 from their farms 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. For us at Digifarms, there is something bigger than just agricultural products that Digifarmers bring to us. They bring value, they give meaning to our work, they are our life support and their daily struggles and aspirations in life matter to us. That's why to us supporting farmers financially is not just intended to help them maximize profits, it boosts their ability to create value and gives them that sense of satisfaction in the work they do for us and as a value oriented enterprise, we believe that our ability to meet the daily demands of our growing community of consumers is hugely dependent on how much we support our Digifarmers.

PRESS: *What are some of the produce/products you sell on your platform and how do u handle the issue of perishability?*

Bruno: Our flagship trading commodities at Digifarms Africa include Yam, rice, Maize, beans, Cassava, garri, plantain and soybeans. We particularly prioritize products with high nutritional value and we make a conscious effort to make these products affordable for the average African consumer. 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 www.digifarmsafrica.com whenever new products are introduced to our list of trading commodities. Just to announce that we just concluded a win-win partnership with the Ndop rice

farmers association and by November 2020 Digifarms Africa will be one of the biggest distributors of high quality locally grown rice in the South West Region of Cameroon. This has always been our dream at Digifarms; to provide value to African farmers, to support the people's quest for high quality agricultural products in Cameroon and to give opportunity to young people.

As regards perishability, we cannot say that we have never experienced major losses especially for our perishable products. In fact just at the beginning of this year 2020, we lost a huge supply of plantains and vegetables that perished in our warehouses in Ekona and Buea and this loss was not because there were no consumers for these goods but because we had serious difficulties transporting these products to our lone Market Centre in Great Soppo Buea, SW Region Cameroon in record time for delivery to our customers. Most of our proximity warehouses are also located in areas that are difficult to access by vehicle and so sometimes getting these products from the warehouses to the main streets for onward transportation to our Market Centres is still a major challenge but we are resilient enterprise, we believe in overcoming challenges and we proudly give ourselves a chance to grow through the difficulties we face. That is why we are still committed to getting these products directly from the farms and delivering them to our customers in their homes. What keeps us going sometimes is really not the profits we make or fail to make at times but the value that we create for farmers and for our customers, that alone is enough to instill resilience in us.

PRESS: *Who are your major customers?*

Bruno: The average African citizen has an equal chance of becoming a consumer of all our products at Digifarms Africa. However, as a tech-driven agribusiness enterprise, we particularly target persons that have access to the internet and can at least use a smartphone. We also very strongly prioritize restaurants, hotels, eateries, food processing companies, and local food vendors in our list of target customers. These are the people for whom we exist. They own the value we create at Digifarms Africa and one of our biggest motivating factors has been the desire to give them value.

PRESS: *Like many other start-ups in the country, the problem of funding and visibility is common. How is Digifarms Africa grappling with this situation and how do you intend to overcome this?*

Bruno: I will speak from experience and I can't agree with you more when you say that our biggest challenge at Digifarms is funding and visibility.

For funding we believe that the best way to overcome the challenges of funding in business is to create value. The more you create value, the more funding and capital you attract and we have never forgotten that at Digifarms Africa. We started Digifarms through bootstrapping and other personal sources of finance and we have since then worked on ploughing back our profits as a way of increasing capital and expanding our ability to create value. In 2019, we significantly received support from the Tony Elumelu Foundation in Nigeria and that has greatly given a boost to the

work we do at Digifarms. Our funding needs are still many, we still have a lot of challenges in terms of product delivery especially considering that we are receiving huge demands from all parts of the African continent but with limited ability to attend to the needs of these consumers. Cameroon's economic capital Douala is increasingly becoming an available market for our products but our production capacity is still limited by lack of funding and sometimes we find it even difficult to make timely payments to our Digifarmers especially for those that deal in perishable products.

For visibility, I am receiving a lot of amazing support especially from my colleagues as a Journalist. Beyond our website www.digifarmsafrica.com, our Facebook page www.facebook.com/digifarmsafrica and our other social media platforms our biggest partners for visibility remains the African and Cameroonian press and I must admit that the support we have received so far has really been amazing. As media practitioner myself, I am particularly leveraging on the fruitful working relationship that I have had with my colleagues over the years to give visibility to the value we create at Digifarms Africa notwithstanding the few financial challenges we still face.

PRESS: *Last word*

I believe in the African promise; the promise of a continent that can feed its population. Africa owns the widest expanse of cultivable farmland in the world today. The agriculture industry remains the highest employer in the continent and generates more in terms of GDP for Africa than oil and gas and this has always been the landmark indicator of the African promise. The African promise today lies in youth, agriculture and the digital economy and we are particularly excited these are the major factors that have defined us at Digifarms Africa. That is why we at Digifarms Africa believe that we are the enterprise of the future. We call ourselves the community of PEOPLE because increasingly we are beginning to discover the value of PEOPLE in all we do from cultivation, to branding, packaging and even delivery. This has always been our dream at Digifarms; to provide value to African farmers, to support the people's quest for high quality agricultural products in Cameroon and to give opportunity to young people. That in essence is our story of Digifarms Africa. I am one of the young people that has never doubted Africa and I think all what is happening in the continent today is just proof that our faith in Africa has always been the right choice. That is the driving force behind Digifarms Africa