

Towards a Young Africa Agri-Tech project in Mozambique

Compelling Situation

Mozambique has vast tracts of agricultural land. Only a tiny percentage of that land is being used for commercial agriculture. Rather than becoming a supplier of agricultural produce, Mozambique now imports food grains, meat and dairy products from other countries. A survey done by Techno Serve in 2007 on agricultural business ventures in the Beira Corridor shows enormous potential for agricultural ventures. Agriculture can certainly become the backbone of the economy in Mozambique and make it not only self sufficient in food, but to export a variety of farm produce.

Young Africa should seize opportunities to promote imparting of hands-on skills in agricultural sector among young people, thus provide greater job opportunities for the young, benefit the nation by skilled work-force in the agriculture sector and lessen the migration into the urban areas.

With the challenge of finding support for running expenses of Young Africa Skills Centers in Zimbabwe, and in another few years to support more developments in Mozambique and in the SADC countries, we need to look for sustainable ways of getting funds. What could be better than making that happen within Mozambique?

In such a scenario, Young Africa intends to provide young people training in various innovative and practical agricultural skills and in trades that support agriculture (diesel / electric pump maintenance, plumbing, building, welding etc.). Young Africa would also provide various community services, as adult education, sports facility for the young, library, crèche and periodic seminars on HIV Aids, health and self-employment.

Overall Strategy

Our strategy is to procure from Government in Mozambique, agricultural land, around 50kms from Beira, about 500 to 800 hectares. We would use 20-25% for agriculture-centered Skills Training Centre for young people, which would also offer services to local farming community, as maintenance of tractors, pump-sets, irrigation equipments, adult education, training in innovative methods of garden farming, trying out organic farming, recreation facilities etc.

75-80% of the land would be used productively, to raise income to support Young Africa projects in Mozambique and other new ones in the Southern African region.

While doing this, through collaboration from Agricultural Universities local and overseas, Young Africa would introduce newer and more efficient methods to boost agricultural yields. So our Agri-Tech project would be an inspiration and a trendsetter, especially to the new comers to the farming community and contribute towards food security of the region and introduce more people into more nutrient food, grown domestically.

At this Agri-Tech project as well, Young Africa would apply its Franchise model that it has been implementing successfully in its existing Skills Training Centers thus ensuring local initiative and expertise, and good turnover.

Favorable Factors: Mozambique

In Mozambique, there are vast tracts of agricultural lands yet to be tapped for commercial farming. In Sofala province of Mozambique, there have been feasibility studies for Agri-business ventures along the Beira Corridor made by TechnoServe 2007. More investments are being made in various sectors of agriculture, and in general new markets are opening up for Mozambique.

There are signs of willingness to revamp the infrastructures of various government agencies to facilitate such agri-business ventures industry in the Sofala region.

While the need for skills training is considered vital issue to be urgently attended to, by the Government and the donor agencies, skills training in agriculture and related industries, is of greater concern. So Young Africa's initiative with an Agri-Tech to provide skills training to young people and various services to the farming community would be very well received.

Young Africa in these three years, with its set up of Centro de Formacao 2006-2009, has won the good will and confidence of the local Government authorities and hence procuring a farm for Agri-Tech and self support could be well within our reach.

The Young Africa project in Mozambique is reaching its completion in 2009, as far as the buildings and equipments are concerned. All the training programs would be implemented by January 2010. The thrust of all efforts and resources would then be capacity building of all the Heads of the Departments, teaching staff and the Management team. But at this stage already one of the two coordinators, could be available to push the initial steps of Agri-tech venture forward, already beginning 2010.

Action Plan

- Clarify initially about the possibility of registration of the Young Africa Agri-Project as a Foreign Investment through YA as far as the commercial side of the farm, but the Agri-tech Training side of the project would certainly fall under the Trustees of Young Africa Mozambique
- About registration: With the Registration of the farm, as a foreign investment, Young Africa International has a direct say on how and where the income of the farm could be directed. This could prevent the local Management team not doing enough to raise income within the existing Skills training project. How much subsidy could go from the farm and how much income could be allotted to particular project, would then be a very calculated and responsible decision made

by the Executive Directors and YA International. Besides, through this system, funds could move across the various Young Africa projects in Southern African region, as needs arise. But this would presuppose, proper study is made on Government policies, conditions on repatriation of money etc..On Foreign Investments.

- November 2009 on, start applying to the Governador da Provinica da Sofala, for a sizeable farm, which holds potential for varied agricultural ventures and suitably located to offer skills training in Agri-Tech to young people and extend various services to the local farming community.
- Get expert evaluation of the land itself from local and external professionals. Then determine the kind of crops that can be grown, the water sources , power connections, possibilities for livestock, availability of sufficiently high grounds for buildings to set up Training Centre, storage and processing building, workshop-yard and residences
- While working on formalities to finalize the acquisition of land:
 1. Put in proposals to donors, and investors who are in agro-based business.
 2. Get in partnership with two universities overseas that have research programs close to our climate and soil conditions.
 3. Identify a person of Southern African region with experience in farming in this region and who can be our farm manager/franchisee,

Specific Areas of further study/exploration and strategies.

- i. Based on the location, size of the land, soil type, available water resources, study what should be grown productively - food crop, cash crop, horticulture, dairy and poultry.
- ii. Study to what extent, what we produce, while providing income for Young Africa, can address important development concerns as contribution to food security, and building healthy-food consumption opportunities for local communities by making our farm products within their purchase power, implementing environment friendly methods of farming, harnessing eco based energy etc.
 - a. Producing vegetables that people include in their diet.

- b. Producing, processing and economy packaging milk that can be easily accessible to ordinary folks, especially for children in the homes, schools, hospitals.
 - c. Making a study of the food items that Zimbabwe imports; and help people to grow these locally, where possible by showing how.
 - d. We could set new trends in implementing well tried out technologies by International Research Institutes, and growing our crops and raise livestock in innovative, production – efficient ways, respecting the eco balance.
 - e. Make a systematic venture in teaching local communities in simple cost effective food processing – e.g. various fruits that grow in abundance seasonally.
- iii. At Young Africa skills training programs, we aim at holistic approach to development. We would need to put idea to work also in the farming sector; one by-product in one department can be used in the other for enrichment. E.g.: cow dung for manure, for gobar gas, for making fuel bricks mixed with hay, rotation of crops to enhance yields and benefit the soil.
 - iv. This would imply that we seek collaboration with Agricultural Universities and Research Centers that are willing to share their expertise for development of farming community and food security.

Once all the above in place, move in and start boldly, decisively and successfully, as Young Africa as always done in the past. It is rooted in the fact; it is not about just a training school, but building the future of a nation, contributing to the future of Africa, with resources, - material, personnel, knowledge drawn from people and their soil.

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