

Heifer International Calls for Stronger Local Partnerships to Transform Agriculture in Africa

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DAKAR, SENEGAL, September 8, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- During the Africa Food Systems Forum in Dakar, [Heifer International](#) urged governments, donors, investors, and development partners to deepen their commitment to local partnerships that can accelerate agricultural transformation across the continent. The organization emphasized that when governments, smallholder farmers, youth innovators, cooperatives, and the private sector work together with the development sector, Africa can build stronger food systems and lasting rural prosperity.



Adesuwa Ifedi, SVP for Africa Programs at Heifer International, urged leaders at AFS Forum 2025 to treat farmers, young innovators as business partners

Agriculture employs nearly two-thirds of Africa's workforce yet receives less than 4 percent of commercial lending. The African Development Bank estimates a financing gap of \$80 billion each year. Smallholder farmers and agri-SMEs, who produce up to 70 percent of the continent's food, often struggle with limited access to credit, weak infrastructure, and high borrowing costs. Closing this gap requires not just new resources, but also smarter partnerships that put farmers at the center.

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Adesuwa Ifedi

Heifer International highlighted how grants and philanthropic support remain key for Africa's agricultural development. At the same time, when these funds are aligned with local realities and partnerships, they can

catalyze innovation and crowd in additional investment. Flexible funding allows young enterprises to test their ideas in real farming conditions, prove their models, and connect with markets.

“The future of African agriculture will be built on strong partnerships and funding that helps innovations move from ideas to scale,” said Surita Sandosham, President and CEO of Heifer International. “Philanthropic support is essential, and by working alongside governments, cooperatives, and the private sector, we can ensure that these funds go further in strengthening local food systems.”

Heifer showcased its work in several countries to demonstrate how this approach is already creating an impact. The AYuTe NextGen (Agriculture, Youth, and Technology Next Generation) is a Heifer International initiative that puts young people and technology at the heart of Africa’s agricultural future. It identifies, supports, and scales agri-tech innovations that address the key challenges faced by smallholder farmers.

In Nigeria, its partnership with Hello Tractor has given more than 20,000 farmers access to affordable mechanization services, helping them plant and harvest on time. In Uganda, youth-led start-ups supported through Heifer’s AYuTe NextGen initiative have expanded mobile-based livestock health and crop advisory services, attracting private investment in the process. In Kenya and Rwanda, partnerships with dairy cooperatives have reduced milk spoilage by up to 30 percent, improving farmer incomes and making the sector more attractive to buyers and processors.

[Adesuwa Ifedi](#), Senior Vice President for Africa Programs at Heifer International, said that these results show what is possible when local actors lead the way. “Farmers must be treated as business partners, young innovators need opportunities to prove their models, and finance must be structured in ways that share risk fairly. Above all, partnerships rooted in local realities create the trust and resilience needed for long-term growth,” she said.

This approach also responds to the barriers faced by women and young people, who make up a large share of Africa’s farmers and food entrepreneurs. Africa’s median age is 19, and women comprise almost half of the agricultural workforce. Yet both groups often struggle to access land, finance, and markets. By linking youth-led enterprises and women farmers to cooperatives, and by designing inclusive partnerships, Heifer is supporting national governments to ensure that agricultural development benefits those who are too often left behind.

Regional strategies such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) call for more than \$100 billion in agrifood investment, with at least 30 percent of opportunities going to women and youth. Heifer’s work demonstrates how these policy commitments can be translated into tangible, community-led action.

Speaking on behalf of recent AYuTe NextGen winners, Carolyn Mwangi, CEO of Kenya-based

Kimplanter Seedlings and Nurseries, emphasized the importance of partnerships: “Across Africa, young entrepreneurs are delivering solutions, from mechanization services to cold-chain logistics. What they need are partners who understand farming realities and who can connect them to markets. This is how resilience and growth are built.”

Heifer concluded that lasting change in African agriculture requires moving beyond fragmented, short-term interventions toward systems that bring farmers, governments, investors and the development sector together. With stronger local partnerships and better-designed support, smallholder farmers can increase their incomes, investors can find viable opportunities, and countries can strengthen food security as their populations grow.

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About Heifer International:

Since 1944, Heifer International has partnered with over 52 million people worldwide to sustainably end hunger and poverty. Operating in 19 countries across Africa, Asia, and the Americas, including the United States, Heifer supports farmers and food producers in strengthening local economies and building secure livelihoods that provide a living income. For more information, visit www.heifer.org/about-us

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