



Outstanding Practice in
AGROECOLOGY 2019



FACTSHEET

Benin – Premium Hortus (2016)

IN BRIEF

Premium Hortus, an African Greentech company for agroecology, specialises in the e-commerce of agroecological products, organic production and producer support in Benin. Available as a web and mobile platform, Premium Hortus allows consumers to subscribe, order, pay online, to get organic products in short food supply chain delivered to their home safely. On the other hand, Premium Hortus offers farmers the opportunity to educate themselves thanks to the technical management advice that informs the farmers of the latest innovations. Waste is limited and recycled for organic composting, biogas, and for the cosmetic industry. Results show that Premium Hortus helped farmers to reduce their harvest loss up to 50% and reduce carbon emissions by 47% compared to industrial agriculture. Premium Hortus is in expansion phase and currently implementing in Morocco, Togo, and Cameroon.

ABOUT THE PRACTICE AT A GLANCE

Organisation: Premium Hortus (Company)

Implemented in: Cotonou, Abomey-Calavi (Benin)

Year: 2016

Beneficiaries: Small farmers, 70% of whom are women and youth, and consumers (households, restaurants, and hotels).

Topic(s): Production, consumption, distribution, technology

PROBLEMS TARGETED / CONTEXT

Like many African countries, Benin has had a rapid increase in its urban population, with high demand for garden produce, such as fruits and vegetables, and, where food insecurity affects a third of families and 16% of children are malnourished. Large quantities of fertilizer and chemical inputs are used and the distribution system remains very traditional, lacking in modern agricultural technology. This causes significant water and soil pollution, biodiversity loss and low productivity, while an increasing population, vulnerability to climate change and price spikes. In this context the e-commerce platform Premium Hortus is combining ICTs, management and local knowledge to develop and promote agroecology and sustainable food.

In 2012, the group Beninese Young Agribusiness Men Project (BYAM), composed of young people involved in agribusiness, was formed and acquired five large cultures in Glazoué (yam, cassava, chili, traditional vegetables) in 2013 thanks to the intermediation between agroecologists and buyers. Following research and experimentation projects, Premium Hortus was formed. Its creation was supported by a small contribution from its founders. Thanks to the support of the OIF and the Swiss Confederation, the business model has been evaluated and improved. We benefited from incubation at UAC START-UPVALLEY, the largest incubator in West Africa, and several trainings, follow-up and support in quality management.

KEY FEATURES OF THE SOLUTION

Premium Hortus' main goals are to develop a greentech for scaling up agroecology in Africa, to promote a circular and inclusive economy by creating short circuits that benefit producers and consumers, and to strengthen the resilience of small farmers by offering them technical support.

Premium Hortus' is an online platform, which allows customers to access the online shop and order fresh, organic produce à la carte - more than 60 varieties of fruit, local and exotic vegetables - to be delivered to their home or restaurant. Currently Premium Hortus delivers to 700 local households, restaurants and hotels, using green transport, customized biodegradable packaging and new logistics. This is the only project of its kind in West Africa. Thanks to its platform (available for computers and mobiles), Premium Hortus ensures the marketing of the final products of the farmers and speed and security of online payments by QR Code and cryptocurrency for its customers. Premium Hortus guarantees relatively fixed costs depending on the subscription (no subscription, periodical subscription or premium subscription; low price variability accessible in all seasons). Furthermore, the company provides a credit assurance system (CALIM+) for consumers, to support them during financially hard times (for birthdays, weddings, etc). To limit waste, food donations and transfers (CONSOM'Acteur) are possible through the platform. It is a Zero Stock system. It automatically generates more than 40% of sales before delivery, with an average cash-flow of € 58,339 and a 48% variable cost margin rate.

Upstream of the sector, Premium Hortus works with organic market gardener groups, which are located on the outskirts of Cotonou, such as the Réseau Africain des Maraîchers Eco Santé (RAMES, African Eco Health Market Gardeners Network). Farmers of the RAMES network produce their own fertilizer with compost and chicken faeces. Additionally, access to bio fertilizers is guaranteed by Premium Hortus through collaboration with a local start-up, Biophyto. Technical support in terms of management is provided to farmers by HORTUS AGRIBOOST, -CONSULTING (personal and practical advice, training for agro-ecological companies), -STARTING (product introduction) and -TECHNOLOGY (CleanTech, biotechnology). The trainings help to assure the formation of new 'agroecologists' who can go on to apply the methods of agroecology and access new markets. To date, 400 'green entrepreneurs' have been trained and are provided with the inputs necessary to convert to agroecological methods.

Premium Hortus has also collaborated with other organisations to organise summits and seminars, such as the International Seminar on South-South Cooperation on Agroecology (March 2018) under the theme "Food Security, Agroecology and Resilient Seed Conservation in Africa", where more than 21 producers attended sessions on food security, agroecology, soil amendment and restoration, climate change resilient peasant seeds and access to the market.

Johannes Goudjanou is the main stakeholder that oversees the development of Premium Hortus, the management and consulting for small businesses and eco-entrepreneurs.

INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

- First platform of urban agroecology in West Africa that enables local short circuits.
- Provides technical management and support for farmers through training.
- Empowers farmers by ensuring small variation in prices and by offering them support in green business management.
- Set up a food assurance credit, which allows consumers to access to healthy food in financially difficult times. Envisions an "organic visa card".
- Limits waste through recycling (composting) and food transfer.

FACTS & FIGURES

- The company currently employs 15 people.
- More than 400 green entrepreneurs and small farmers have been trained in business management with technical support in agroecology and access to markets.
- Access of more than 400 producers to certified natural, bio-pesticides and bio fertilizers, made from local plants.
- By 2017, the online sales platform had 1,069 users.
- Sustainable access to more than 700 urban households subscribing to agroecological products without food waste.
- Premium Hortus was recognized as "Innovation for Agroecology" by the FAO and Winner of the ICAF Award (Climate Initiatives) 2017 at COP23.

OUTCOME, IMPACT & EFFECTIVENESS

- Farmers reduced their harvest loss up to 50 %.
- Preserves the soil, water, biodiversity and health of more than 400,000 African households.
- 200 youth trained in 2017 in Agriculture Business Plan and Modern Techniques of Fundraising.
- Reduced about 47% greenhouse gases out of a total 1,681 kg / ha / year emitted by conventional agriculture; saving of 31% of direct energy on a total 3,088 Kwh / ha / year used for transportation, tractors irrigation, and self-propelled in conventional agriculture, for a total of 6,727 Kwh / year.
- Creation of at least 500 sustainable jobs / year in rural farms of which 70% are women and young people.
- More than 43 farms have good productivity (45% more), lower production costs, increased revenues and improved living conditions.
- 60% reduction of food waste for the subscribers, in particular in fruit and vegetables.
- Adoption of specific bio fertilizers, certified and locally produced from weeds, replaces 8,000 kg / ha of pesticides and chemical fertilizers.

OUTLOOK, TRANSFERABILITY, SCALABILITY & COST-EFFICIENCY

At its creation, Premium Hortus financed itself through low personal contributions. Within 3 years the business became profitable, viable and sustainable with an average turnover of EUR 138,114 and overall costs of estimated EUR 61,329 (76,875 profit). By 2017, the rate of profitability was at 15%. By 2020, they plan to have a minimum increase of 50% in performance compared to 2017. They seek support from partners such as the FAO, IFDD (Institute of Francophonie for Sustainable Development), the Swiss Confederation, UN WOMEN, ICAF (Initiatives Climat Afrique Francophone), ISW (International Secretariat for Water), etc. As the business is in expansion phase (implementation in Morocco, Togo, and Cameroon), Premium Hortus is fundraising at least EUR 50,000 from investors.

To up-scale they seek knowledge sharing with other innovators and advice to improve, as well as resources to expand. In particular technology such as for the control of water through drip irrigation, pest management, emission measurement, good management of food-free storage, e-commerce of healthy products, online payment solutions, Food Insurance Credit System, collection and treatment of agro-ecological big data, would permit Premium Hortus to replicate on a higher scale its practice.

INTERVIEWEE FEEDBACK

Number of points: 22,5 out of 23

Summary: The interviewee provided a lot of information on all aspects of the practice,

and comprehensive answers were satisfactory for all questions, indeed only 0.5 points were lost overall.

1 (Sustainable use of resources) – 5.5/6 – Valuation and preservation of natural resources through soil conservation, organic practices and sustainable water management. All waste managed, reduced and reused. Chase away pests rather than killing them, crop rotation favourable for biodiversity. Use biomass to feed and support entire agricultural system, circular economy techniques. Economically feasible and sustainable, 50% of expenses covered by subscriptions.

2 (Equity and eradication of poverty) - 4/4 – Addresses poverty through supporting access to healthy food and reduction of waste. Producers also become less vulnerable. Distribution system supports and empowers producers. Security in payment. Information for consumers on how food benefits them. 200 jobs created yearly. Many women and young people involved. Local techniques and markets are the basis of all activities.

3 (Precautionary approach to human health, natural resources and ecosystems) - 2 / 2 Activities safeguard health of agricultural system, ecosystems, biodiversity and human health. Food security reinforced. System of certification is based on participative approach and removes risk.

4 (Public participation and access to information) - 3/3 – Participative approach links consumers and producers, and takes the needs of all into consideration. Good links with researchers. Information provided for all on price, quality and commercial activities.

5 (Governance and human security) 3/3 – Transparent internal governance system and strategic operations. Code of conduct which gives sanctions to those who don't follow regulations. Company is registered in the African Organisation of Intellectual Property. All seeds selected with rigour and do not create farmer dependence.

6 (Integration, interrelationship- human rights, social, economic and environmental objectives) - 3/3 –Primarily a resilience approach which integrates justice and protects most vulnerable. Support for producers, agro-ecology methods throughout. Promotion of healthy and diversified diets are central and enabled for people for whom this would otherwise be impossible.

7 (Common but differentiated obligations) - 2/2 – Appropriate for target area and works with terrain diagnostics. Each consumer can come to the farm. No vulnerable party, a lowering of costs for producers and less waste.

CONTACT

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LINKS AND FURTHER READING

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100 Projects for the Climate: Project Page Premium Hortus: <http://100projetspourleclimat.gouv.fr/en/projects/616-premium-hortus>

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Biophyto (2018): <http://biophyto-benin.com/> Global Green Growth Institute (2018), “Use ICTs for Scaling up agroecology to achieve the SDGs: PREMIUM HORTUS, the African greentech for Agroecology in implementation in Morocco”, In: IPS news: <http://www.ipsnews.net/2018/09/use-icts-scaling-agroecology-achieve-sdgs-premium-hortus-african-greentech-agroecology-implementation-morocco/>

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Presentation Premium Hortus. The African Greentech (2018): https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yatL_nN2j76LdC7S0VY3eO-pT6xsMlo8/view

Theau Benoit (2018), Premium Hortus Benin, video: <https://vimeo.com/241588385>

FAO (2018), 2nd FAO Symposium on Agroecology in Rome. Exhibition Report and Debate: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/1bbvahs9twa23aj/Rapport%20d%27Exposition%20et%20D%C3%A9bat%20INNOVATION%20FOR%20AGROECOLOGIE%2C%202nd%20Symp%20FAO.pdf?dl=0>

The International Forum Youth Entrepreneurship Green in Marrakech (FORUM JEV, 2018), Report: <http://www.jeunes-entrepreneurs-verts.org/Le-Forum/Restitutions>

Some further video links: <https://vimeo.com/241588385f> ; https://youtu.be/w9_3TLzO-eNQ; <https://youtu.be/IrHyeZDTjak>; <https://youtu.be/IrHyeZDTjak>; <https://youtu.be/MBSK5UeeK4Y>; <https://youtu.be/vHoV5NBDYOo>; <https://youtu.be/rvOO8jPlruc>; www.initiativesclimat.org; <https://youtu.be/ZvKn4bLVLGg> ; <https://solarimpulse.com/companies/premium-hortus>