

Young West African farmers turn social media into tools for growth

Young farmers have quietly transformed agriculture using WhatsApp, TikTok and Facebook, creating economic opportunities and upskilling networks that may outperform billion-dollar AgTech platforms, yet remain largely invisible to policymakers.

- Young farmers across Côte d'Ivoire and Benin are transforming agriculture by innovatively using social media platforms as market intelligence networks and peer learning platforms.
- This grassroots digital innovation boosts income, generates employment, and improves economic inclusion through social agriculture networks that reach millions.
- The opportunity remains largely invisible to policymakers, funders, and incumbent AgTech platforms, who could support and scale this digital infrastructure to reach even more people.

10th September 2025 – Millions of young farmers across West Africa are re-inventing everyday social media platforms, transforming them into agricultural tools that improve farm productivity, boost income, generate employment, and enable peer-learning online, according to new research from Caribou in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation.

Young agricultural entrepreneurs across Côte d'Ivoire and Benin are using social media platforms for purposes beyond their original design. They have turned group chats and communities into marketplaces where farmers compare prices across markets. They use live streaming to show urban customers their products to build trust that leads to sales. They share videos teaching each other how to spot plant diseases or mix organic pesticides.

The research, which interviewed young producers, processors, and traders across rice, cashew, and soy value chains, documents how farmers have extended access to critical information that traditional agricultural systems provide through the innovative use of social media platforms.

Redefining what's possible through everyday social platforms

In countries where official agricultural support services, known as extension services, reach fewer than one in five farmers, where 86% of adults lack bank accounts, and where rural farmers routinely receive below-market prices, everyday social media platforms have become essential infrastructure for many.

A cashew farmer in rural Côte d'Ivoire might wait weeks for an agricultural agent, then sell their harvest for half its value because they lack market price information. A young farmer processing soy in Benin cannot access loans because banks don't serve certain rural areas or cannot reach urban customers without ways to display products.

Social media addresses these gaps. This same cashew farmer might instead receive daily price updates via WhatsApp from farmers in other regions. The soy processor may post product photos on Facebook and receive mobile money payments from customers hundreds of miles away. Young farmers can film pest management techniques and share solutions, creating practical knowledge repositories.

How farmers are repurposing social platforms

The study documents how farmers have transformed everyday platforms into essential agricultural tools:

- **WhatsApp as market intelligence:** Farmers create groups organized by crop and region, sharing price information and alerting each other to reliable buyers or fraudsters
- **Facebook as a storefront:** Processors and traders create business pages showcasing products and operations, building customer trust and brand loyalty
- **TikTok as a training platform:** Young farmers create videos demonstrating farming techniques that can be watched repeatedly and adapted to local conditions
- **Instagram for branding:** Urban processors use professional presentation to attract middle-class customers and international buyers

Growing digital divides and policy blind spots

National digital strategies across the West African Economic and Monetary Union focus largely on formal businesses and purpose-built platforms. They have limited focus on the digital channels and tools used informally by large portions of the population.

This disconnect has consequences. Farmers using social media for business operate without consumer protection or recourse when defrauded. They cannot easily access training, funding, or support available to formal businesses. Those without smartphones or data, particularly rural women, are at risk of exclusion.

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The research found that while governments and donors spend millions building specialized agricultural platforms attracting hundreds of users, millions of farmers have already built their own digital ecosystem on existing social platforms.

The research also revealed divides between male and female farmers in platform use. While young men in cities use TikTok to build agricultural brands, rural farmers may not afford data for certain platform functions, such as video content.

Women are responding through collective action. The study documents "DigiQueen" clusters in Benin where women pool money for phones and data, sharing devices and teaching digital skills. In Côte d'Ivoire, women's cooperatives use WhatsApp voice notes in local languages to include members with limited literacy.

Charlene Migwe, Program Director at Caribou, said:

"Social agriculture is led by youth and women who are reshaping livelihoods and reimagining a future for farming that is community-driven, digitally enabled, and full of potential to scale. Unlocking this potential will be the next big leap for agrifood systems."

Eunice Muthengi, Acting Senior Director for Research and Learning at the Mastercard Foundation, said:

"Women agripreneurs across West Africa are innovating with limited resources, from sharing devices, teaching digital skills, and building inclusive networks on platforms not designed for agriculture. Imagine what they could achieve with the right tools, training, and support. The potential to unlock even greater impact is there, and could be transformative for them and their communities."

Recommendations for action

The study calls for stakeholders to work with and scale the digital infrastructure that farmers have already built, rather than replacing it with new systems. Its specific recommendations include:

- **Governments:** Recognize and support existing digital practices in agricultural policies to scale and strengthen its impact rather than creating new systems.
- **Development organizations:** Deliver training through platforms farmers already use and partner with successful social media agripreneurs.
- **Platform companies:** Enable monetization features like mobile money integration to unlock value for millions of agricultural users.
- **Investors:** Direct capital towards rural connectivity and scaling farmer-created models rather than wholly new platforms to compete with them.

You can learn more about the program and the farmers involved in a video overview [here](#).

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About the study

The research examined social media use among young farmers, processors, and traders in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin's rice, cashew, and soy value chains. Through interviews with 26 agripreneurs, 23 institutional

stakeholders, 7 training institutions, and 8 focus groups involving 56 participants, the study documented how social platforms serve as informal agricultural infrastructure.

Key findings include: 7 million social media users in Côte d'Ivoire and 2.4 million in Benin, with 24.8% using digital tools for agricultural purposes. However, only 11% of rural Benin residents have electricity access, and women are 19% less likely to use mobile internet than men.

The full report, "Social Agriculture in WAEMU: Driving Sustainable Livelihoods and Job Creation," provides detailed evidence and actionable recommendations for stakeholders.

About Caribou

Caribou is a global consultancy working with ambitious foundations, companies, and governments to accelerate and deliver impact in a digital age, applying deep technical expertise and rigor to fund and program management, strategy and policy design, impact measurement, actionable research, and immersive learning initiatives. Caribou works towards a world in which digital economies are inclusive and sustainable, driven by secure livelihoods, innovative business models, and resilience to a changing climate. Follow on [LinkedIn](#) and [subscribe to the newsletter](#).

About the Mastercard Foundation

The Mastercard Foundation is a registered Canadian charity and one of the largest foundations in the world. It works with visionary organizations to advance education and financial inclusion to enable young people in Africa and Indigenous youth in Canada to access dignified and fulfilling work. Its Young Africa Works strategy aims to enable 30 million young people to access dignified and fulfilling work by 2030, while its EleV strategy will support 100,000 Indigenous youth in Canada to complete their education and transition to meaningful work aligned with their traditions, values, and aspirations.

Established in 2006 through the generosity of Mastercard when it became a public company, the Foundation is an independent organization. Its policies, operations, and program decisions are determined by its Board of Directors and Leadership team. For more information on the Foundation, please visit www.mastercardfdn.org.

Appendices – data and evidence

SECTION 1: RESEARCH SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

Table 1: Primary research sample

Country	Agripreneurs	Institutional stakeholders	Training institutions	Focus groups	Total participants
Côte d'Ivoire	15	15	3	4 (28 people)	65
Benin	11	8	4	4 (28 people)	55
Total	26	23	7	8 (56 people)	120

Value chains studied: rice, cashew, soy

SECTION 2: DIGITAL AGRICULTURE SCALE & OPPORTUNITY

Table 2: Market size and digital penetration

Indicator	Côte d'Ivoire (2024) ¹	Benin (2025) ²
Population	29.2 million	14.6 million
Mobile penetration rate	145.1% (43.6 million subscriptions)	114% (16.6 million subscriptions)
Mobile internet subscriptions	34.5 million	11.07 million
Fixed internet penetration	1.5%	0.2%
Active social media users	7.0 million (24% of population)	2.4 million (16.4% of population)
Dominant social platforms	Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram	Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram
Internet usage (% of population)	39.6%	32.2%
Active mobile money accounts	>20 million	>9 million
Primary rural digital barriers	High data costs; rural network gaps	Limited devices; electricity access; digital training access
Cost of 1 GB mobile data as % of monthly GNI per capita	1.5%	5.7%

SECTION 3: GAPS IN ACCESS AND INCLUSION

Table 3: Gender and rural-urban differences

Divide type	Gap size	Who's affected	Citation
Gender - internet use	Women 19% less likely to use mobile internet	Rural women especially	GSMA 2023 ³
Gender - literacy	Côte d'Ivoire: 40% (F) vs 60% (M); Benin: 36% (F) vs 58% (M)	Women across both countries	World Bank 2021 ⁴
Geography - internet	Côte d'Ivoire: 50% urban vs 22% rural	Rural populations	Internet Society Pulse 2023 ⁵
Geography - mobile money	Fewer than 1 in 3 women use mobile money services	Women in both countries	Afrobarometer 2020 ⁶
Infrastructure - electricity	Only 11% of rural Benin has access	Rural communities	Field research 2025

DATA APPENDIX CITATIONS

1. DataReportal. "Digital 2024: Côte d'Ivoire." February 23, 2024. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-cote-divoire>.
2. DataReportal. "Digital 2024: Benin." February 23, 2024. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-benin>.
3. GSMA. (2023). *The State of Mobile Internet Connectivity Report 2023*. London: GSMA Head Office. <https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/The-State-of-Mobile-Internet-Connectivity-Report-2023.pdf>
4. Global Findex Database 2021: *Côte d'Ivoire Country Data*. <https://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/4631>
5. Internet Society Pulse. (2023). *Côte d'Ivoire Country Profile*. <https://pulse.internetsociety.org/en/reports/CI/>
6. Afrobarometer. (2020). *African Women Have Less Access to the Internet Than African Men -- and That's a Problem*. <https://www.afrobarometer.org/articles/african-women-have-less-access-internet-african-men-do-thats-problem/>

Appendices - case studies, Benin

Al-Djanantou Seydou, Parakou, Benin

Inspired by her mother's soy farming and soy cheese-making business, Al-Djanantou is an entrepreneur transforming soy oil into soaps and soy flakes. Her business combines tradition with innovation to meet local health and market needs. She also shares her recipe for enriched porridge made from soy, which has been used to combat child malnutrition in her community.

She uses Facebook, WhatsApp, and Meta Business Suite to produce engaging content, Canva and CapCut to design and edit visuals, and ChatGPT to generate ideas, tailor messages, and craft effective hashtags.

Al-Djanantou is not only building her business but also positioning herself as a mentor. She envisions scaling her enterprise internationally while equipping rural women with digital and entrepreneurial skills.

"I want to train other young women in rural areas and build an international brand," said Al-Djanantou Seydou.



Maximilien Gnantonou, Biro, Benin

Maximilien is a young producer specializing in soy, corn, peanuts, and rice. His entrepreneurial spirit is rooted in the belief that agriculture provides a steady income for those who invest their time and energy. He is eager to diversify into sesame cultivation, a crop he sees as underexplored in Benin.

"When you dedicate yourself to the land, it never fails to give you income," said Maximilien.

While not yet using social media for his farming, Maximilien is highly motivated to start. He recognizes digital platforms as essential for accessing new markets and expanding his customer base.

His next step is to combine experimentation with digital outreach, linking traditional crop production with modern marketing strategies to grow his business and inspire his peers.



Diane Tchoroue, Natitingou, Benin

Diane is part of a women's collective that grows, transforms, and markets soy. Formed three years ago, the group supports each other by sharing equipment, coordinating production, and pursuing small-scale commerce. Their specialty is soy cheese (fromage de soja), produced especially when surplus harvests cannot be stored. By pooling resources, the collective reduces waste and stabilizes income across seasons.

The group uses WhatsApp and Facebook for simple yet effective marketing. They post photos of soy cheese on WhatsApp status, check prices with peers before travelling, and fulfill orders placed via WhatsApp by sending products on buses.

The collective's efforts show how women can drive local economies by combining traditional skills with modern communication. Diane hopes to find new storage solutions to improve price stability and strengthen their resilience.

"Together, we transform challenges into opportunities," **said Diane Tchoroue.**



Appendices - case studies, Côte d'Ivoire

Josiane Asso Lobar, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Josiane entered rice farming inspired by her father's struggles with market access. Determined to avoid similar pitfalls, she built a platform that spans distribution, transformation, and production, creating resilience across the value chain. By establishing a factory in Bongouanou and adding her own production, Josiane ensures a steady supply and processing capacity. She tailors her operations to meet demand across multiple markets.

She promotes her work on Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Instagram, creating videos, flyers, and photos to reach customers across Côte d'Ivoire and beyond.

Josiane has earned the title of "Queen of rice" and she is demonstrating how women can build strong agribusinesses by combining professional branding with value chain integration. Her model highlights the importance of research, adaptation, and visibility.

"Agriculture succeeds when we learn from past failures," - said Josiane Asso Lobar, Côte d'Ivoire.



Fatou Dosso – Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire

A married mother of three, Fatou started her own cashew processing business after five years working in a cashew factory. Today, she transforms raw cashew nuts into a diverse range of high-quality products for local and regional markets. By watching online tutorials and adapting the techniques to her context, she taught herself to produce flavoured cashew almonds coated in chocolate, milk, honey, and ginger. Renowned for their consistency and taste, her products have earned a loyal and expanding customer base.

She finds inspiration from young entrepreneurs on TikTok and builds connections and support through WhatsApp training groups.

Fatou's goal is to expand her unit and employ more women, building a business that supports both livelihoods and food innovation in Côte d'Ivoire.

"Quality keeps customers coming back," said Fatou Dosso, Côte d'Ivoire.



Maryse Carole Yoboué – Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire

Maryse leads a rice production company that manages the entire value chain, from financing producers to supplying markets. She supports farmers with seeds and fertilizers, buys back their harvests, and oversees processing, packaging, and sales. Her integrated model links production with processing and retail. By supplying supermarkets and restaurants, she creates reliable market outlets while systematically expanding the number of farmers financed each season.

She follows agricultural content on TikTok and sees the potential of social media to grow her business, but has yet to post herself and is looking for guidance.

Maryse's ambition is to build a large transformation factory that scales her model nationally and internationally, making rice farming more profitable and visible.

"Financing farmers is the key to transforming rice into opportunity," said **Maryse Carole Yoboué, Côte d'Ivoire.**

