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Social Agriculture in the West African Economic and Monetary Union

DRIVING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS AND JOB CREATION

Social Agriculture in the West African Economic and Monetary Union

Authors

This report was written by Abbie Phatty-Jobe and Evariste Dongo Kouadio, with support from Charlene Migwe and Jonathan Donner.

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Executive summary

Agriculture is central to the economies of Côte d'Ivoire and Benin, providing livelihoods for the majority of the population and underpinning national food security. Yet gaps in formal support systems persist, and youth and women continue to face barriers to accessing land, finance, extension services, and cooperative leadership. These barriers leave many excluded from opportunities to improve productivity or enhance their livelihoods.

Against this backdrop, digital practices are reshaping how farming, processing, and trading take place. Social agriculture — the use of social media to exchange information, access markets, and build communities — has emerged as a defining feature of this transformation. WhatsApp groups have become vital channels for coordination and advice. Facebook pages now serve as storefronts, enabling visibility far beyond local markets. TikTok and Instagram are bringing local produce and new farming techniques to wider audiences, with youth often at the centre of digital storytelling. For many agripreneurs, these platforms are more than communication tools — they are extensions of advisory systems, marketplaces, and communities.

This report builds on Caribou's earlier studies of social agriculture in Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal, extending the analysis to Côte d'Ivoire and Benin. Drawing on interviews, focus groups, and regional desk research, it examines how youth and women are navigating digital opportunities, the barriers they encounter, and the ecosystem conditions that shape their participation. It highlights the ingenuity with which agripreneurs adapt mobile-first tools to their realities, the informal networks that fill gaps left by formal systems, and the new types of work emerging as digital practices evolve.

INSIGHTS

1. **Adoption:** Social agriculture is reshaping youth engagement in farming, but ecosystem barriers limit reach. Young people are using WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok to promote products, exchange knowledge, and connect with buyers. Smartphone penetration, high data costs, and gendered constraints mean adoption remains uneven, especially in rural areas.
2. **Skilling:** Digital skills are expanding through peer-led learning, but training ecosystems remain uneven. Agripreneurs are gaining practical competencies — taking product photos, managing online sales, or experimenting with mobile payments — often through trial and error or peer coaching. Formal training remains largely urban and assumes a level of digital confidence that many women and rural youth do not yet have.
3. **Ecosystem:** Formal support structures are adapting slowly, leaving gaps filled by informal networks. Traditional extension services, cooperatives, and national training institutions struggle to keep pace with digital change. In their absence, agripreneurs have built online communities and peer groups that now play critical roles in knowledge exchange, trust-building, and even resource pooling.
4. **Monetization:** Financial pathways are widening, but ecosystem exclusions constrain platform use. Agripreneurs are using mobile money, crowdfunding, and community trust networks to mobilize finance. Barriers to formal platform monetization in francophone West Africa — combined with weak integration between social media and financial systems — limit broader participation.
5. **Trust:** Credibility and risk management are central, shaped by social norms and fragile digital infrastructure. Social media opens new markets, but fraud, misinformation, and harassment remain major risks. Agripreneurs manage these challenges through transparency, reputation, and collective monitoring, showing how trust continues to underpin digital exchanges.
6. **AI:** Emerging tools are opening possibilities, but ecosystem readiness remains limited. Urban agripreneurs are beginning to test AI for branding, marketing, and customer interaction. While these tools hint at future opportunities, they often remain ill-suited to the realities of informal, mobile-first economies.

POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS

- Governments and policymakers should formally recognize social agripreneurs in agricultural and digital economy strategies, expand mobile-friendly identity and financial systems, and strengthen consumer protection in digital markets.
- NGOs, training institutions, and development partners should scale peer-led training and mentorship models, ensure women and rural youth are included in user testing and tool design, and invest in accessible digital safety and financial literacy programmes.
- Research institutions should deepen evidence on social agriculture's economic impact, test innovative approaches such as community financing and AI-enabled advisory, and ensure insights are made accessible to practitioners and policymakers.
- Farmer groups and cooperatives should build collective digital presence, pool resources for shared visibility, and formalize peer training roles that are already filling extension gaps.
- Private sector actors, including platforms and agritech companies, should adapt products to the realities of informal digital economies, reduce barriers to platform monetization, and develop partnerships with local trainers and farmer groups.

CALL TO ACTION

By connecting digital innovation with the lived experiences of young agripreneurs — particularly women and rural communities — social agriculture can become a powerful driver of inclusive employment, food system resilience, and digital participation across WAEMU. Coordinated investment, recognition, and policy support are now essential to ensure this potential is realized.

Introduction

Across Africa, young people are reshaping how they engage with agriculture. They are using everyday social media and digital tools — from WhatsApp groups to TikTok tutorials — in ways that are practical, adaptive, and responsive to their needs. A growing number of producers, processors, and traders are building informal systems of knowledge exchange, marketing, and peer support through social media.

Caribou calls this evolving set of behaviours **social agriculture**.[1] These emerging practices are opening new pathways to economic opportunity, allowing youth, particularly women, to strengthen and diversify their agricultural livelihoods through entrepreneurial activities. Though largely informal and often overlooked by traditional support structures, social agriculture is gaining traction across the continent as a catalyst for inclusive economic growth and job creation for youth and women navigating structural barriers in agriculture.

In practice, social agriculture plays out across three interconnected dimensions. These digital behaviours are not just reshaping how agriculture works — they are also reshaping who participates and who benefits.

- **Information exchange:** Enabling young people to share practical advice, receive feedback, and learn from peers.
- **Market access:** Helping producers and processors reach consumers, promote products, and build personal brands.
- **Community building:** Creating support networks that offer encouragement, identity, and collaboration.

1 Caribou, "Social Agriculture."

Many who engage in social agriculture are **agripreneurs**: farmers, traders, processors, and other agricultural actors who apply entrepreneurial thinking to their work, testing new ways to produce, promote, and profit from agriculture. This framing, used by organizations such as the FAO,[2] IFAD,[3] and CTA,[4] surfaces a broader range of innovation within agriculture, from young cooperatives using Facebook Marketplace to sell processed cassava directly to urban buyers to female poultry entrepreneurs using Instagram reels to build brand identity and reach new customers.

While not all farmers are agripreneurs, many aspire to be, and digital tools are increasingly enabling them to pursue and realize those ambitions. Digital tools offer smallholders pathways to move beyond commodity production, opening opportunities to build sales channels and position their products in more competitive markets. Agripreneurship is not defined by digital savviness alone, but by agency to shape market participation, willingness to experiment, and resilience to navigate structural constraints.[5]

Drawing on insights from the rice, cashew, and soy value chains in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin, this study examines the interplay between digital practices, enabling ecosystems, and lived experience. While centred in social agriculture, the study also explores the emerging role of AI tools in agriculture. Current usage remains limited, but early experiments with AI for content generation, productivity support, and enterprise tasks raise important questions about future inclusion and access. The analysis grounds technology in context, highlighting both opportunity and constraints, and identifying where targeted investment in skills, infrastructure, and inclusive design can unlock more resilient and dynamic agricultural futures.

2 FAO, *Agripreneurship across Africa: Stories of Inspiration*.

3 IFAD, *Creating Opportunities for Rural Youth: 2019 Rural Development Report Overview*.

4 CTA, "Challenges and Opportunities in Agriculture for African Youth."

5 FAO, Rethinking Agripreneurship.

BACKGROUND

Caribou's research on social agriculture across sub-Saharan Africa has centred on agripreneurs' experiences and perspectives to understand how they use social media platforms to transform their livelihoods. Studies in Kenya,[6] Nigeria,[7] Ghana,[8] and Senegal[9] document how tools like YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok are most impactful post-harvest, particularly in marketing, processing, and connecting to urban and diaspora markets. WhatsApp and Facebook remain dominant channels, while video platforms like TikTok and YouTube are increasingly adopted by younger agripreneurs. Despite these developments, persistent structural barriers limit broader adoption. Digital divides shaped by geography, gender, and infrastructure constrain equitable access. Training ecosystems are often underdeveloped, and formal agricultural extension services have yet to integrate social media into their models.

This study builds on these foundations and adopts a holistic ecosystem perspective, shifting the lens beyond individual use to examine how infrastructure, policy environments, institutional frameworks, and digital skills systems collectively shape the growth of social agriculture, enabling or constraining its potential. Two specific areas of focus guide the study:

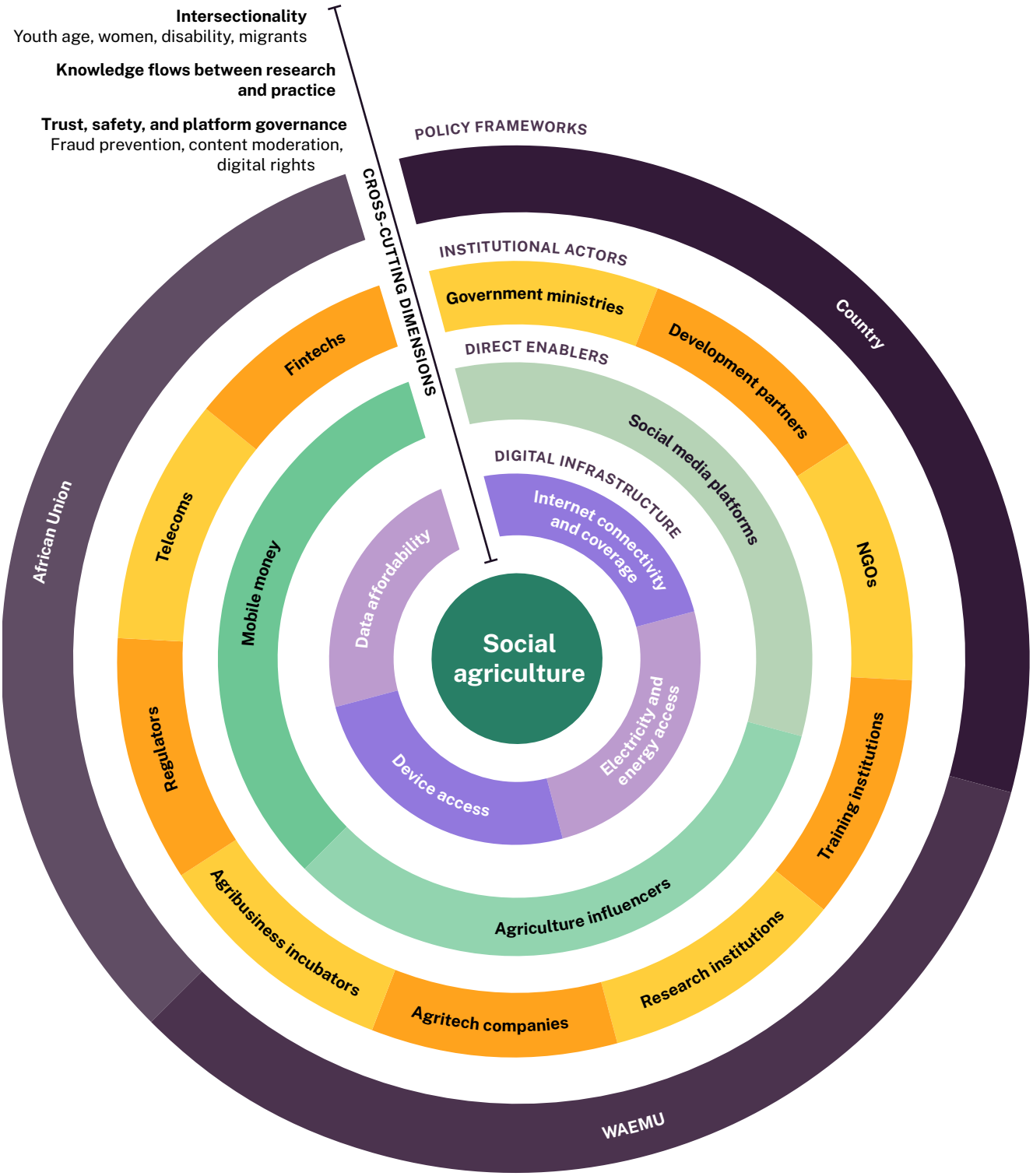
- **Ecosystem enablers and barriers.** Infrastructure, platform design, upskilling systems, and public policy all shape whether young agripreneurs can access and benefit from digital tools in ways that are sustainable and inclusive. Understanding these broader conditions is key to identifying what supports or constrains social agriculture.
- **Skills and capacity.** From basic digital literacy to content creation, marketing, and the emerging use of AI, agripreneurs' ability to engage meaningfully with digital tools depends on access to relevant upskilling and entrepreneurial support. Without these skills, digital participation risks remaining fragmented and limited to peer-led or ad hoc practices rather than evolving into sustained, scalable pathways for business growth and market participation.

Drawing on insights from agripreneurs, cooperatives, government agencies, NGOs, training institutions, and private sector stakeholders, the study explores the systemic conditions and lived experiences that influence how social media is used in agriculture. By analysing these dynamics across Côte d'Ivoire's and Benin's cashew, rice, and soy value chains, the study aims to generate actionable insights to inform policy, programming, and investment strategies that can support the meaningful scale-up of social agriculture.

6 Habitus Insight and Caribou, Social Agriculture in Kenya.
7 Kilimo Source, Caribou, and Habitus Insight, Value Chain Analysis of Social Agriculture in Nigeria.
8 Boateng et al., Social Agriculture: How Social Media Is Reshaping Agriculture Value Chains in Ghana.
9 Caribou, Cultivating Connections: How Social Media Powers Post-Production in Senegal's Agriculture Sector.

FIGURE 1

Social agriculture ecosystem map



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

At the centre of this inquiry is a practical question:

> How can social media platforms move from use by individual agripreneurs to become strategic, scalable drivers of livelihood development and job creation for youth and women across agricultural value chains?

To answer this, the study addresses four key sub-questions:

1. How do agripreneurs use social networks to generate sustainable income and strengthen agricultural livelihoods?
2. What is the potential of social agriculture to create wider economic opportunities for other youth and women?
3. What ecosystem conditions enable or constrain the adoption of digital tools by young and female agripreneurs?
4. What skills and capacities are needed to support meaningful and inclusive engagement with social agriculture?

METHODS

The research adopted a qualitative, multi-method approach combining **literature review, interviews,** and **focus group discussions**. Table 1 summarizes the research participants involved in the study by role and country.

Literature review

A structured literature review was conducted to establish the theoretical and contextual foundations of the study, to frame the study's conceptual approach, to inform the design of data collection tools, and to identify knowledge gaps. This review synthesized insights from a diverse range of sources, including:

- Academic publications on digital agriculture, social media usage, and youth employment in agri-food systems.
- Policy documents and technical reports from development agencies and regional bodies.
- Blogs, digital content, and market analyses capturing emerging trends in agritech, digital skills, and AI applications.
- Context-specific materials related to the engagement of youth and women in agriculture in WAEMU.

“I want to train other young women in rural areas and build an international brand.

PROFILE

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. Her work promotes soy’s nutritional benefits and practical versatility — she shares her recipe for enriched porridge made from soy, which has been used to combat child malnutrition in her community.

Al-Djanantou 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.

Qualitative field study

Primary data collection was conducted via semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, involving a total of 112 research participants across Côte d'Ivoire and Benin: youth agripreneurs, institutional stakeholders, training providers, and participants in focus groups. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure diversity across gender, value chain engagement, and geographic context, including rural, peri-urban, and urban areas. Data collection was conducted in person, allowing for richer contextual understanding and more nuanced discussions around access, challenges, and lived experiences.

Key informant interviews

Semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with three key participant groups.

- **Agripreneurs (youth and women 35 years and under)**
  In Côte d'Ivoire, 15 interviews were conducted with young producers, processors, and traders across rice, cashew, and maize value chains. In Benin, 11 interviews focused on soy, rice, and cashew producers and processors. Interviews explored social media and AI adoption practices, skills needs, and livelihood impacts.
- **Ecosystem actors**
  Interviews were conducted with representatives from cooperatives, NGOs, development agencies, public institutions (including extension services and regulators), and private sector companies. These interviews explored institutional perspectives, existing support structures, and policy environments shaping digital adoption. Fifteen interviews were conducted in Côte d'Ivoire and eight in Benin.
- **Training institutions**
  Interviews were conducted with representatives from digital training providers and agribusiness incubators. These explored the availability, accessibility, and relevance of digital skills training for young and female agripreneurs. Three interviews were conducted in Côte d'Ivoire and four in Benin.

TABLE 1

Research participants in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin

COUNTRY	AGRIPRENEURS (KIIS)	INSTITUTIONAL STAKEHOLDERS	TRAINING INSTITUTIONS	AGRIPRENEURS (FGDS)	TOTAL
Côte d'Ivoire	15	15	3	28	**61**
Benin	11	8	4	28	**51**
Total	26	23	7	56	**112**

Focus group discussions

Four focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in each country. Each engaged between six and eight participants, with a total of 28 participants per country. Participants were grouped by age, gender, and role in agricultural value chains to encourage open dialogue. FGDs explored collective perceptions of and shared experiences with social media and AI tools, challenges in digital adoption, and skills gaps.

FGDs were held in rural, peri-urban, and urban areas to reflect a broad cross section of agripreneurs' realities. Each session was facilitated by a trained moderator and supported by a note-taker. Sessions lasted between 75 minutes and 90 minutes, with audio recording and participant consent.

Analytical approach

This study applied a thematic, comparative lens across Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, and Senegal, drawing on new data from Côte d'Ivoire and Benin and integrating insights from an earlier Caribou study in Senegal.[10] The analysis surfaces both structural patterns and context-specific dynamics, offering a foundation for future research and strategy development.

The research focused on six core dimensions, with a consistent lens on **youth participation**, **gendered access**, and **social inclusion**. This framework enabled a holistic understanding of the opportunities and barriers shaping digital agripreneurship in the two countries.

1. **Regional context:** Country demographics, economic conditions, and development indicators that influence agricultural and digital technology adoption.
2. **Agricultural value chains:** Key crops, value chain structures, and the roles of women and youth across production, processing, and marketing.
3. **Social agriculture practices:** Use of platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok for market access, knowledge sharing, and community building.
4. **Digital access and usage:** Patterns of mobile ownership and internet access, data and device affordability, and platform preferences with attention to rural-urban, gender, and age disparities.
5. **Skills and training systems:** Availability and accessibility of training, upskilling opportunities, and digital capabilities needed to use social media and AI tools effectively, specifically for social agriculture.
6. **Ecosystem conditions:** Infrastructure, institutional, and policy frameworks, and local-level factors that enable or constrain adoption, scale, and sustainability of social agriculture.

10 Caribou, Cultivating Connections: How Social Media Powers Post-Production in Senegal's Agriculture Sector.

CONTEXT

Agricultural and digital dynamics

WEST AFRICAN ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION (WAEMU)

The West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU; UEMOA in French) is a regional bloc comprising eight West African countries that share the CFA franc and trade policies: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo. While most member states are francophone, Guinea-Bissau is a lusophone country.[11] Together, WAEMU countries represent approximately 137 million people, with a median age of under 20 years, one of the youngest populations globally.[12]

Despite sustained economic growth in some member states, development indicators remain below African and global averages. WAEMU's average Human Development Index score in 2022 was 0.510, compared to 0.547 for sub-Saharan Africa and 0.739 globally.[13] The WAEMU Commission reports that real GDP growth in the region averaged 5.7% in 2023, driven primarily by services and agriculture. But structural vulnerabilities persist, including high youth unemployment, underinvestment in rural infrastructure, and limited economic diversification. Young women face compounded disadvantages: they represent three of every five youth classified as NEET (not in employment, education, or training) in sub-Saharan Africa.[14]

Agriculture plays a central role in the region's economies, contributing approximately 35% of regional GDP and employing around 60% of the

11 IMF, "West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) Documents."
12 UNCTAD, "UNCTAD Charts Path to Inclusive Growth in West African Economic and Monetary Union."
13 UNDP, "Human Development Insights."
14 ILO, "Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024: Sub-Saharan Africa."

working population.[15] Yet formal systems often fall short in addressing the needs of smallholder farmers, particularly youth and women, who remain largely excluded from formal agricultural support structures, including access to land, finance, cooperative leadership, and extension services.[16] This structural exclusion reinforces cycles of marginalization and limits the potential of agriculture as a driver of inclusive economic growth.

Internet connectivity rates vary significantly across WAEMU. In countries such as Senegal, internet penetration exceeds 60%, while in others, including Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, rates remain below 40%.[17] Côte d'Ivoire sits in the upper tier of WAEMU countries in terms of digital progress, supported by relatively robust infrastructure and increasing digital adoption in urban areas. Benin shows lower levels of connectivity, though digital development is advancing, particularly in peri-urban zones.

Research consistently highlights digital infrastructure as a critical barrier to meaningful digital engagement. A 2022 CIRAD study found that, while approximately 80% of farmers in francophone West Africa own mobile phones, fewer than one in five (≤20%) use smartphones.[18] Connectivity gaps further exacerbate these challenges. According to GSMA, 38% of adults in the region live within mobile broadband range but do not use it. Rural adults in low-and middle-income countries are 29% less likely to use mobile internet than their urban counterparts, and women are 19% less likely to be connected than men.[19] Where coverage does exist, data affordability, digital literacy, and unreliable electricity continue to limit uptake. As a result, most engagement with digital tools occurs through basic social media platforms rather than purpose-built agritech platforms. For example, farmers rely primarily on WhatsApp and Facebook for peer exchange and market coordination.[20]

≤20%

Fewer than one in five francophone farmers in West Africa use smartphones.

In this context, social media platforms are emerging as informal yet significant pathways for economic participation in the agricultural sector. They offer low-cost, accessible entry points to markets, knowledge exchange, and community-building, enabling young people and women to develop agri-businesses outside traditional institutional structures. Largely youth-driven and informally structured, social agriculture spans a range of activities, from content creation and social commerce to digital extension and community mobilization. However, in francophone West Africa, the emergence of social agriculture remains poorly understood by policymakers, researchers, and formal extension networks.[21]

15 IFAD, "West and Central Africa."
16 FAO and World Bank, A Blueprint for Strengthening Food System Resilience in West Africa.
17 World Bank Open Data.
18 CIRAD, "Digital Adoption in West African Agriculture."
19 GSMA, The State of Mobile Internet Connectivity 2023.
20 CIRAD, "Digital Adoption in West African Agriculture."
21 World Bank, "From Fields to Markets: The Role of Digital Platforms in West Africa's Agricultural Success."

CÔTE D'IVOIRE AND BENIN

Agriculture remains a cornerstone of the economies of both Benin and Côte d'Ivoire. In Côte d'Ivoire it contributes around 17.9% of GDP and employs around 45% of the national workforce.[22] In Benin, agriculture contributes 25.4% of GDP, employs around 28% of the total workforce, and supports over 70% of rural populations.[23]

Côte d'Ivoire's diversified value chains include cocoa, coffee, rubber, and tropical fruits such as pineapple and mango. Rice, an essential food security crop, is largely managed by older male producers through cooperatives and state-backed value chains. Youth and women participate largely in informal roles, labour, transport, and trade, with limited involvement in higher-value activities such as processing.[24] Cashew nuts are one of Côte d'Ivoire's is the world's leading exporter of raw cashew, but local value addition is limited.[25]

In Benin, cotton dominates export agriculture, accounting for up to 40% of GDP and 80% of export earnings.[26] Like Côte d'Ivoire, Benin prioritizes rice and cashew as strategic value chains. Cashew alone contributes more than 50% of agricultural exports. Women and youth are mainly involved in early-stage processing and informal trade activities.[27]

Across both countries, young people represent on average around 60% of the agricultural workforce, primarily in informal, seasonal, and low-paid roles. Official unemployment rates are low — 2.3% in rural Côte d'Ivoire and 1.7% for youth in Benin[28] — but these figures mask widespread underemployment and reliance on low-productivity livelihoods. A lack of gainful employment opportunities limits pathways out of poverty.[29] Formal value chains such as rice and soy remain largely inaccessible to youth and women, who are often excluded from cooperative leadership and face significant barriers to access finance, mechanization, and value-added opportunities.[30] In contrast, informal or semi-formal value chains, including cashew, cassava, and horticulture, offer more accessible, though precarious, entry points. These sectors expose participants to price volatility and limited institutional support, but present real opportunities for income generation, particularly when paired with digital tools and social media platforms that improve visibility and market access.[31]

40%

In Benin, cotton dominates export agriculture, accounting for up to 40% of GDP and 80% of export earnings.

22 World Bank Open Data.
23 World Bank Open Data; Lloyds Bank, "The Economic Context of Benin."
24 World Bank, "Republic of Côte d'Ivoire Agricultural Sector Update."
25 IFAD, "Republic of Côte d'Ivoire Country Strategic Opportunities Programme 2020-2025."
26 IFAD, "Benin."
27 Magbondé et al., "Impact of Informal Institutions on Youth Agribusiness Participation in Southern Benin."
28 Agbetiloye, "Top 10 African Countries with the Lowest Unemployment Rate."
29 Magbondé et al., "Impact of Informal Institutions on Youth Agribusiness Participation in Southern Benin."
30 World Bank Open Data.
31 Nguimkeu and Okou, "Can Mobile Technologies Enhance Productivity?"

Digital realities shaping social agriculture in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin

The digital landscape in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin reveals both opportunity and inequality. Both countries are mobile-first environments, where mobile phones are the primary means of internet access and digital engagement.[32] Lightweight, low-data platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram have become the default tools for rural agripreneurs to access information, coordinate sales, and build customer networks.

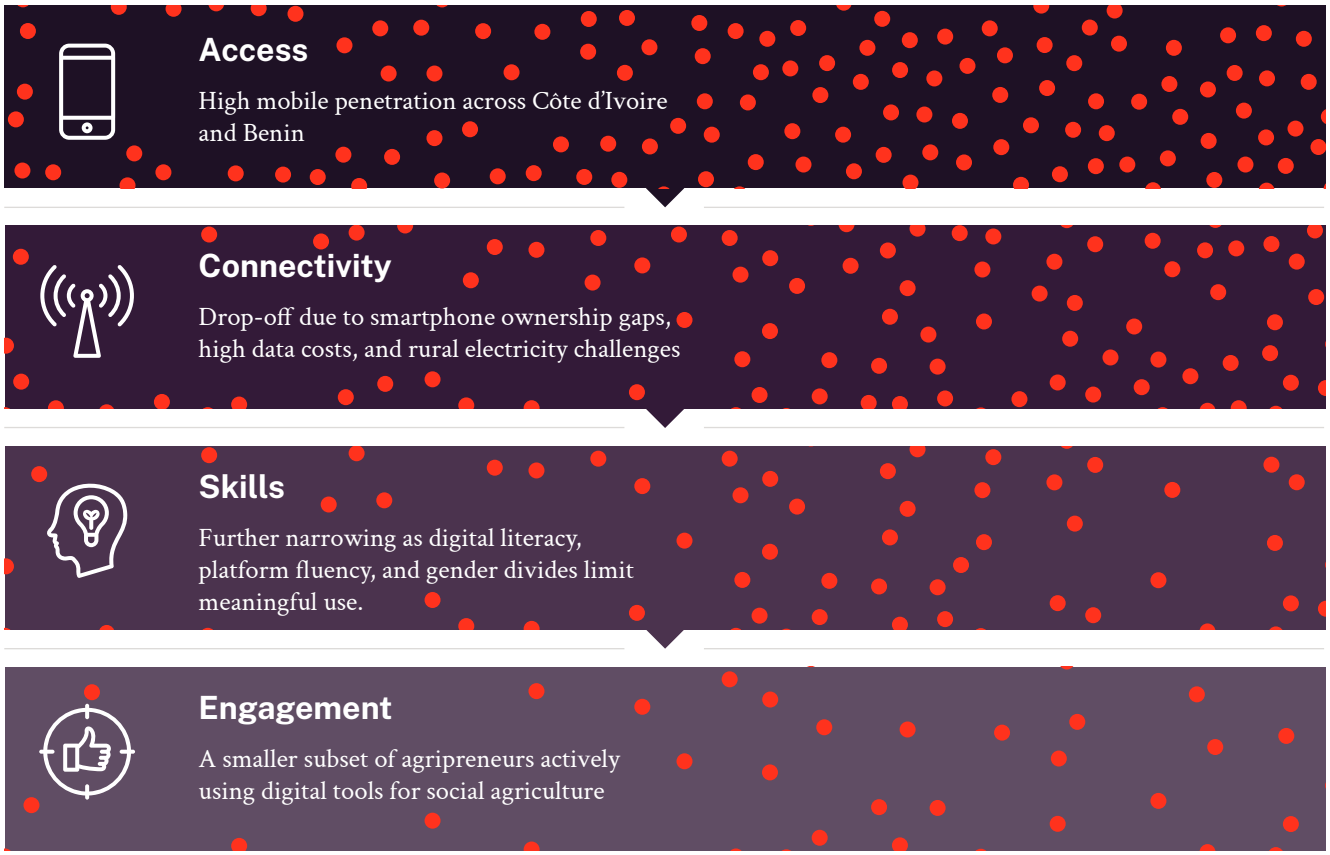
Affordability remains a major structural constraint. In 2024, 1 GB of mobile data costs 5.7% of monthly GNI per capita in Benin[33] and 1.5% in Côte d'Ivoire.[34] While these rates are a significant improvement from the double-digit levels of a decade earlier, Benin still exceeds the UN/ITU 2% affordability benchmark.[35] Device affordability compounds this challenge. In sub-Saharan Africa, an entry-level device costs 95% of average monthly income for the poorest 20%.[36] For rural youth and women, whose incomes are often lower than urban peers, these costs make sustained digital engagement difficult.

5.7%

In 2024, 1 GB of mobile data cost 5.7% of monthly GNI per capita in Benin.

FIGURE 2

Barriers for social agriculture



32 GSMA and UK Department for International Trade, The Rise of Africa's Digital Economy: Tackling the 'Usage Gap' to Create a Thriving Market for Mobile Services.
33 Internet Society, "Country Report for Benin."
34 Internet Society, "Country Report for Côte d'Ivoire."
35 Internet Society, "Country Report for Benin."
36 Internet Society, "Country Report for Côte d'Ivoire."

Despite these barriers, social media use is expanding rapidly. As of January 2024, approximately 15.5% and 23.9% of the population in Benin and Côte d'Ivoire, respectively, were active on social media.[37] While a region-wide study on WAEMU farmers' use of social media is not available, a study in northwestern Nigeria found that 90% of farmers used WhatsApp and 92% used Facebook to access information, connect with buyers, and market their produce, underscoring the centrality of social media in their livelihoods.[38] This emerging participation highlights both the scale of the opportunity and the importance of reducing the structural barriers that still prevent widespread adoption. Figure 2 shows the steep drop-offs in social agriculture use that occur as barriers accumulate.

23.9%

As of January 2024, approximately 23.9% of the population in Côte d'Ivoire were active on social media.

There is limited research on the numbers of agripreneurs using social media or the income they derive from social agriculture. Most studies focus on digital tool availability or platform use in general, offering little insight into the financial outcomes or scale of engagement. Yet the scale of the opportunity is undeniable. The total addressable market for social agriculture is estimated at over 200 million people in 2018. A 2018 dataset from Facebook's ad platform identified more than 224 million potential agricultural users across countries outside Latin America, Europe, and North America, where more than 15% of the labour force is employed in agriculture.[39] Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, stands out as one of the most promising growth regions. While social media penetration varies across the continent, from 14.5% in West Africa to 41.4% in Southern Africa, youth engagement on social media has risen significantly and continues to rise.[40] The evidence gap hampers policy and program design, and risks underestimating the financial potential of social agriculture led by youth and women.

TABLE 2

Digital access and inclusion indicators in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin

Sources: Datareportal, "Digital 2024: Benin"; Datareportal, "Digital 2024: Côte d'Ivoire."

INDICATOR	CÔTE D'IVOIRE (2024)	BENIN (2025)
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 subscriptions	11.07 million subscriptions
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 (overall)	39.6% of population	32.2% of population
Mobile money accounts	Over 20 million active accounts	About 9 million active accounts
Primary rural digital barriers	High data costs, rural network gaps	Limited devices, electricity access, and digital training
Cost of 1 GB mobile data	1.5% of monthly GNI per capita	5.7% of monthly GNI per capita

37 Datareportal, "Digital 2024: Benin"; Datareportal, "Digital 2024: Côte d'Ivoire."
38 Muhammad et al., "Impact of Social Media Platforms on Farmers' Livelihood Assets in North-Western Nigeria."
39 Caribou Digital.(2022). Social Agriculture in Kenya: Key Takeaways
40 DataReportal, "Digital 2023 July Global Statshot Report."

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

PROFILE

Maximilien Gnantonou

Biro, Ndali, Benin

Maximilien is a young producer specializing in soy, corn, peanuts, and rice. His entrepreneurial spirit is rooted in a belief that agriculture provides a steady income for those who invest their time and energy. He is eager to diversify into sesame, a crop he sees as underexplored in Benin, and to move from rudimentary tools to modern mechanization to increase efficiency and output.

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 peers.

Regulatory frameworks and digital policy in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin: Implications for social agriculture

Social agriculture thrives in informal spaces. Yet, despite its growing visibility among young agripreneurs in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin, it remains largely invisible in policy frameworks and regulatory agendas. Existing digital policies tend to focus on formal enterprises, public sector digitization, or industrial-scale innovation, leaving a gap in support and protection for the grassroots digital behaviours that define social agriculture.

At the regional level, WAEMU's *Digital Economy Framework* promotes cross-country harmonization and infrastructure development, but similarly focuses on formal market actors and digital startups rather than the digitally mediated activities of informal traders, micro-processors, and rural cooperatives.[41]

This regulatory disconnect has real implications. For agripreneurs, unclear platform rules, inconsistent rule enforcement, and lack of legal recognition increase vulnerability to fraud, account suspension, and exploitation. In a 2022 ILO study on digital platform work, women in West Africa reported difficulty understanding platform terms of service and managing online harassment, issues that are equally relevant to female agripreneurs building businesses through social media.[42]

Côte d'Ivoire's *Stratégie Nationale du Numérique* (2021–2025) outlines ambitious goals for digital transformation, including rural connectivity, e-commerce growth, and greater inclusion of women and youth in the digital economy. Similarly, Benin's *Programme d'Actions du Gouvernement* (2021–2026) promotes smart agriculture and digitization across priority sectors. While these strategies are not expected to focus on informal agripreneurs or social media use in agriculture, their current scope leaves a critical gap: they do not account for the growing number of youth and women using social media platforms informally to enhance their livelihoods.

This absence reflects a broader disconnect between formal digital policy frameworks and the lived realities of digital adoption by women and youth. Across Côte d'Ivoire and Benin, agripreneurs are not waiting for formal systems to reach them — they are using mobile-first, low-cost tools to build agricultural livelihoods in real time. Yet these behaviours remain unrecognized in policy, leaving them unsupported by public investment in training, protection, and infrastructure.

41 World Bank, "From Fields to Markets: The Role of Digital Platforms in West Africa's Agricultural Success."

42 ILO, "Trade Union Revitalization: Organizing New Forms of Work Including Platform Workers."

These gaps are not unique to Côte d'Ivoire and Benin. Across WAEMU, national digital strategies tend to prioritize formal sectors, urban innovation hubs, and enterprise-level transformation. As a result, the informal and youth-led practices that define social agriculture remain overlooked. This policy invisibility risks entrenching inequality, excluding the very actors who are using digital tools most creatively to transform rural livelihoods. To better understand this dynamic, this research takes a deep dive into the specific contexts of Côte d'Ivoire and Benin, examining how social media is being adopted and adapted by young agripreneurs to reshape agricultural engagement from the grassroots.

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT:

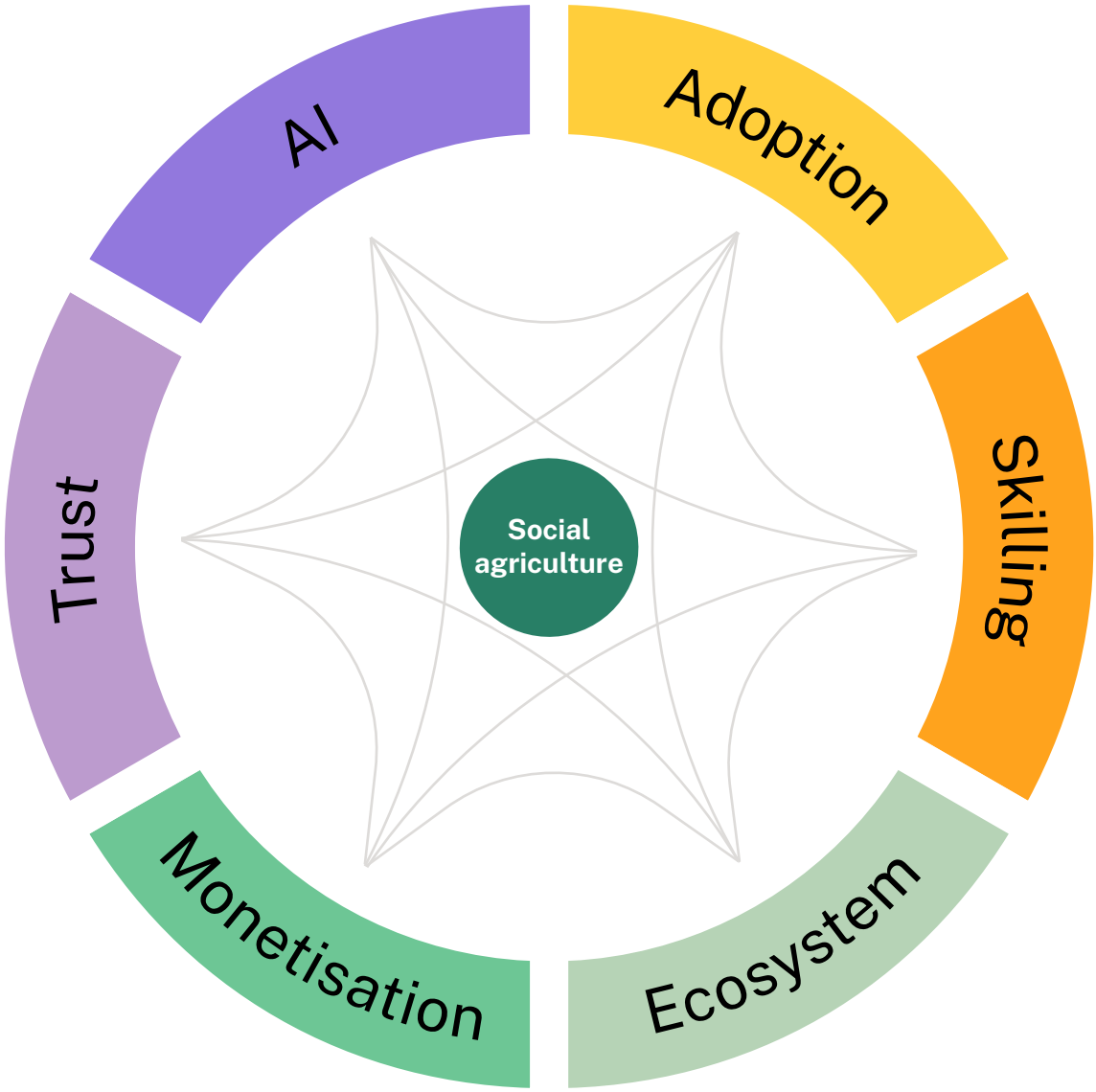
The untapped power of social agriculture to boost youth and women's agricultural livelihoods

This section presents six interconnected insights drawn from the field research. Together, they reveal how social agriculture is reshaping economic participation for youth and women across Côte d'Ivoire and Benin's agricultural value chains, often from the margins. While digital access and skills remain uneven, and trust and infrastructure are far from guaranteed, the ingenuity of these actors is creating momentum that deserves greater attention from funders, governments, and development partners alike.

These practices point to a broader reimagination of agricultural livelihoods, grounded in everyday platforms, driven by young people's choices, and expanding possibilities for rural transformation.

FIGURE 3

Insights map



SOCIAL MEDIA IS WIDELY ADOPTED BY AGRIPRENEURS; HOWEVER, DIFFERENCES IN RURAL-URBAN USAGE PATTERNS EXIST

> "Some of us in the city record short videos about price updates and send them to the rural WhatsApp group, because many there can't easily access online market platforms.
>
> **Urban agripreneur association,** Côte d'Ivoire

In both Côte d'Ivoire and Benin, the number of active mobile subscriptions exceeds the national population — about 1.45 per person and 1.14 per person, respectively — meaning many people use more than one SIM card. Yet regular internet use remains low, with stark rural–urban and gender divides. In Côte d'Ivoire 43% of men use the internet compared to 34% of women, and about half of urban residents are online versus just 22% in rural areas.[43] In Benin, one in two men regularly use the internet compared to one in three women.[44] These divides mean that many rural agripreneurs, especially women, rely predominantly on basic mobile functions, shaping who can participate in social agriculture.

50%

In Côte d'Ivoire about half of urban residents are online.

Against the backdrop of structural challenges in literacy, digital access, and institutional support, social media has emerged as an essential tool for information exchange, market access, and community building. While constrains remain a growing number of youth and women are experimenting with these everyday digital tools to navigate market barriers and build agricultural livelihoods. This shift, though uneven and often precarious, reflects a broader pattern of informal digital engagement emerging in response to exclusion from formal agricultural systems.

Exchanging information

Social media has become an informal but vital channel for sharing agricultural knowledge in contexts where public extension services often fail to reach youth and women. In much of sub-Saharan Africa, the extension agent-to-farmer ratio commonly ranges from 1:3,000 to 1:10,000, far above FAO's recommended benchmark of 1:500.[45] In certain cases, public and NGO extension agents participate in WhatsApp groups to share verified information, but these examples are limited and inconsistent across both countries.

43 Internet Society, "Country Report for Côte d'Ivoire."
44 Lardies et al., "African Women Have Less Access to the Internet than African Men Do. That's a Problem."
45 AGRA, "Extension Strategy: AGRA's Private Sector-Led Approach to Extension."

WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, YouTube, and TikTok now function as decentralized advisory networks, filling gaps left by under-resourced systems. Through these platforms, agripreneurs exchange a wide range of practical, real-time information:

- **Agronomic advisory.** Through WhatsApp groups, for example, agripreneurs share daily updates on input availability, pest control techniques, and seasonal planting advice. In one rural WhatsApp group in Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire, farmers exchange photographs of pest damage and collectively discuss treatment solutions. Sometimes advice is shared directly from peer to peer, while in other cases, agripreneurs circulate short videos showing fertiliser application techniques, seed treatment methods, or simple irrigation hacks.
- **Market price information.** Beyond agronomic practices, market price is one of the most valued forms of information shared in these groups, enabling farmers to negotiate better prices with traders and make informed decisions about where and when to sell. Some urban agripreneurs create short market update videos and post them in rural WhatsApp groups.
- **Weather information.** Some more digitally connected agripreneurs follow regional weather pages on Facebook, but most depend on peer-shared updates within local WhatsApp communities. In Parakou, Benin, for example, farmers post photos of rain conditions in nearby villages, helping others to plan planting schedules or delay harvests based on localized conditions.
- **Technical and operational advice.** Agripreneurs exchange practical tips on machine usage, troubleshooting production issues, and improving storage and packaging. Voice notes, step-by-step photo guides, and short videos are common formats, providing hands-on solutions to everyday technical challenges.
- **Business support and risk management.** Farmers share customer feedback, delivery photos, and testimonials to build trust with potential buyers. Groups also function as informal safeguarding spaces, where fraud alerts about scam buyers or suspicious accounts are circulated to help peers manage risks and avoid financial losses.
- **Access to opportunities.** WhatsApp and Facebook groups serve as important channels for circulating announcements about training sessions, funding opportunities, and NGO or institutional support programs. Through this peer-driven information sharing agripreneurs can access resources that might otherwise remain out of reach due to limited formal networks.

While peer-shared advice fills critical gaps, much of it lacks formal validation, and misinformation can circulate unchecked, highlighting the need for stronger links between formal advisory systems and existing digital communities.[46]

46 Caribou, *Social Agriculture in Ghana and Nigeria*.

Expanding market access

Social media is reshaping how farmers across Côte d'Ivoire and Benin reach customers. But use differs sharply between rural and urban agripreneurs due to connectivity, skills, and customer bases.

Rural agripreneurs focus primarily on WhatsApp, using personal networks and community WhatsApp groups to share daily stock, product photos, and market prices. These interactions are built on trust, proximity, and local languages, with WhatsApp doubling as a sales tool and real-time channel to reduce transaction risks. Even modest digital engagement can open new opportunities.

> "Thanks to Facebook, I sell at higher prices in Abidjan than at my local market and the buyers pay via mobile money.

Rural agripreneur, Côte d'Ivoire

By contrast, urban and peri-urban agripreneurs adopt more professional, multi-platform strategies using Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp Business, and increasingly TikTok to access national and cross-border markets, especially for niche or processed products. They invest in visuals and live content, treating their online presence as a core asset. Many experiment with paid advertising, simultaneously manage multiple channels, and produce professional content — from product photography to branded videos — to differentiate themselves in competitive markets.

> "By investing just 5,000 francs to boost my Facebook post, I was able to reach 100 prospects outside the country, especially in Niger and Togo. Before, my sales were only local, but now I am getting messages from buyers I never thought possible.

Rodrigue, agripreneur, urban Benin

Urban agripreneurs are increasingly adopting WhatsApp Business to automate customer responses, showcase product catalogues, and manage orders efficiently, focusing on reach, brand identity, and sales diversification. Rural sellers, on the other hand, prioritize relationship-based marketing within their communities.

Building communities

> "When I'm discouraged by a negative comment, it's the group that lifts me up.

Woman processor, urban Côte d'Ivoire

Beyond commerce, social media groups strengthen community ties among agripreneurs in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin. In rural areas, WhatsApp groups bring together farmers, traders, and occasionally extension agents to coordinate transport, share inputs, exchange labour, and troubleshoot agricultural challenges in real time.

For women, social media offers spaces of solidarity and mutual support. Dedicated Facebook and WhatsApp groups allow them to share practical tips, encourage each other, and navigate gendered barriers such as social scrutiny and concerns about digital visibility.

In Benin, informal **"DigiQueen" clusters** pool funds for equipment, co-create marketing strategies, and share strategies to manage harassment while balancing family responsibilities with maintaining professional visibility. In Béomi, Côte d'Ivoire, a women's rice-processing cooperative transformed operations after creating a WhatsApp group, sharing agronomic tips, pooling resources, and jointly tackling logistical challenges. Their collective digital presence attracted new buyers and NGOs, expanding their customer base and unlocking equipment grants.

> "Before, we waited for the extension agent; now, we share tips, price updates, and help each other daily.

Member of women's cooperative, Béomi, Côte d'Ivoire

From small groups to organized clusters, these digital communities are filling gaps left by formal agricultural services, enabling new models of peer support, leadership, and collective action for youth and women.

Alongside these group dynamics, **agriinfluencers** represent a distinct expression of community building within social agriculture. They are youth who combine storytelling with digital strategy, cultivating trusted followings that extend beyond their immediate networks. In doing so, they not only share knowledge and showcase opportunities but also influence perceptions of agriculture, shifting mindsets and strengthening credibility and trust within online agricultural communities. This makes them central to how peer-to-peer learning, market access, and collective identity are reinforced in digital spaces.

While both urban and rural agripreneurs in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin use social media to strengthen their livelihoods, the ways they engage are shaped by their environments (Table 3). In rural areas, limited connectivity, high data costs, and lower digital literacy influence platform choice and content style. Social norms and gender expectations also affect when and how people — especially women — participate in online spaces. These structural and social factors create distinct usage patterns that policy and programme design must recognize and address.

THEME	RURAL AGRIPRENEURS	URBAN/PERI-URBAN AGRIPRENEURS
Platforms used	WhatsApp, basic Facebook	Facebook, WhatsApp Business, TikTok, Instagram
Market reach	Local, nearby towns	Regional, national, sometimes cross-border
Sales strategy	Personal referrals, status updates	Paid promotions, professional pages
Barriers	Connectivity, device costs, basic digital skills	Competition, content management, logistics, advanced digital skills
Community focus	Peer support groups, collective action	Networking groups, brand building

TABLE 3

Usage patterns of social media platforms between rural and peri-urban and urban agripreneurs

Motivations for adopting social agriculture

The choice to adopt social media for agriculture reflects a mix of practical needs and strategic goals. Across these diverse practices, agripreneurs describe a consistent set of motivating factors that reflect both practical needs and strategic ambitions:

- **Market access.** Farmers across rural, peri-urban, and urban settings value the ability to find buyers without leaving their farms. Urban processors and traders use platforms to reach new clients and present themselves professionally. Many report being motivated by seeing peers increase sales simply by posting photos online.
- **Efficiency and cost savings.** Sharing updates in WhatsApp groups is quicker and cheaper than making multiple calls. Digital payments reduce cash-handling risks and delays, streamlining transactions.
- **Peer influence and support networks.** Success stories from friends and encouragement from women's groups are powerful motivators, helping many — especially women — overcome initial hesitation about posting and promoting products.
- **Autonomy and independence.** Underlying these drivers is the desire to take control: to find information, build markets, and mobilize support on one's own terms, particularly where formal systems are absent or unresponsive.

These motivations illustrate why social agriculture is expanding even in contexts of limited connectivity or digital literacy. They also explain the diversity of adoption pathways. Some see social media as a survival strategy to bypass market barriers, and others treat it as a platform for professional growth and expansion.

Ecosystem actors broadly view social media as a catalyst for agripreneurship, opening new pathways for market access, visibility, and peer-to-peer learning. While there are few formal regulatory obstacles, the absence of clear strategies or official guidance means agripreneurs often navigate these spaces informally and without structured support. Ecosystem actors see their role in filling these gaps through sensitization, training, and partnerships that connect agripreneurs with influencers, technology providers, and markets. At the same time, the see the need to advocate for policies that expand digital infrastructure and integrate social media into national extension strategies.

DIGITAL SKILLS AMONG YOUTH AND UPSKILLING OPPORTUNITIES ARE GROWING, BUT WOMEN AND RURAL AGRIPRENEURS ARE AT RISK OF BEING LEFT BEHIND

> "Before, I didn't know how to use Facebook for business. Now I can sell even outside my locality because of the tricks I learned during the NGO workshop.

Rodrigue, peri-urban Côte d'Ivoire

Digital skills are becoming as essential to livelihoods as literacy and numeracy. Yet, while social media adoption is widespread across Côte d'Ivoire and Benin, rises sharply by geography and gender. This mirrors broader structural inequalities in education, infrastructure, and market access. World Bank data shows that in Côte d'Ivoire, adult female literacy stands at 40%, compared to 60% for men. In Benin, female literacy is 36% versus 58% for men — both below sub-Saharan Africa averages (62% for women; 75% for men).[47]

In digital contexts, literacy increasingly means the ability to navigate apps, mobile finance platforms, and content creation tools.[48] In rural West Africa, lack of digital literacy is cited as frequently as — if not more often than — basic literacy as a barrier to mobile internet adoption.[49] As a recent Mastercard Foundation EdTech Mondays panel emphasized, "*Digital skills are on the same level as numeracy and literacy skills, and in future, all children will have to be equipped with digital skills.*"[50]

47 World Bank Open Data.

48 CIRAD, "Digital Adoption in West African Agriculture"; GSMA and UK Department for International Trade, *The Rise of Africa's Digital Economy*.

49 GSMA, *The State of Mobile Internet Connectivity 2023*.

50 Mastercard Foundation, "Accelerating Digital Literacy to Benefit Education Systems in Africa."

Digital skills powering social agriculture

Social agriculture relies on a layered skill set that builds on the basics to more advanced competencies. Caribou's research on social agriculture in Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, and Kenya shows that agriculture value chain actors require at least three categories of digital skills:

1. **Foundational digital literacy:** Using smartphones, navigating apps, and managing digital profiles.
2. **Applied platform skills:** Creating content for WhatsApp, Facebook Marketplace, or TikTok; managing customer queries; and promoting products online.
3. **Digital financial capabilities:** Receiving and making digital payments, setting competitive prices for online sales, and managing transaction processes through mobile money or other digital finance tools.

Broader digital inclusion literature points to a fourth skill domain that is increasingly important for social agriculture:

4. **Digital risk awareness and platform safety:** Recognizing scams and misinformation, understanding platform rules and terms of service, managing online harassment, and protecting data and identity.[51]

A fifth, emerging domain is also taking shape:

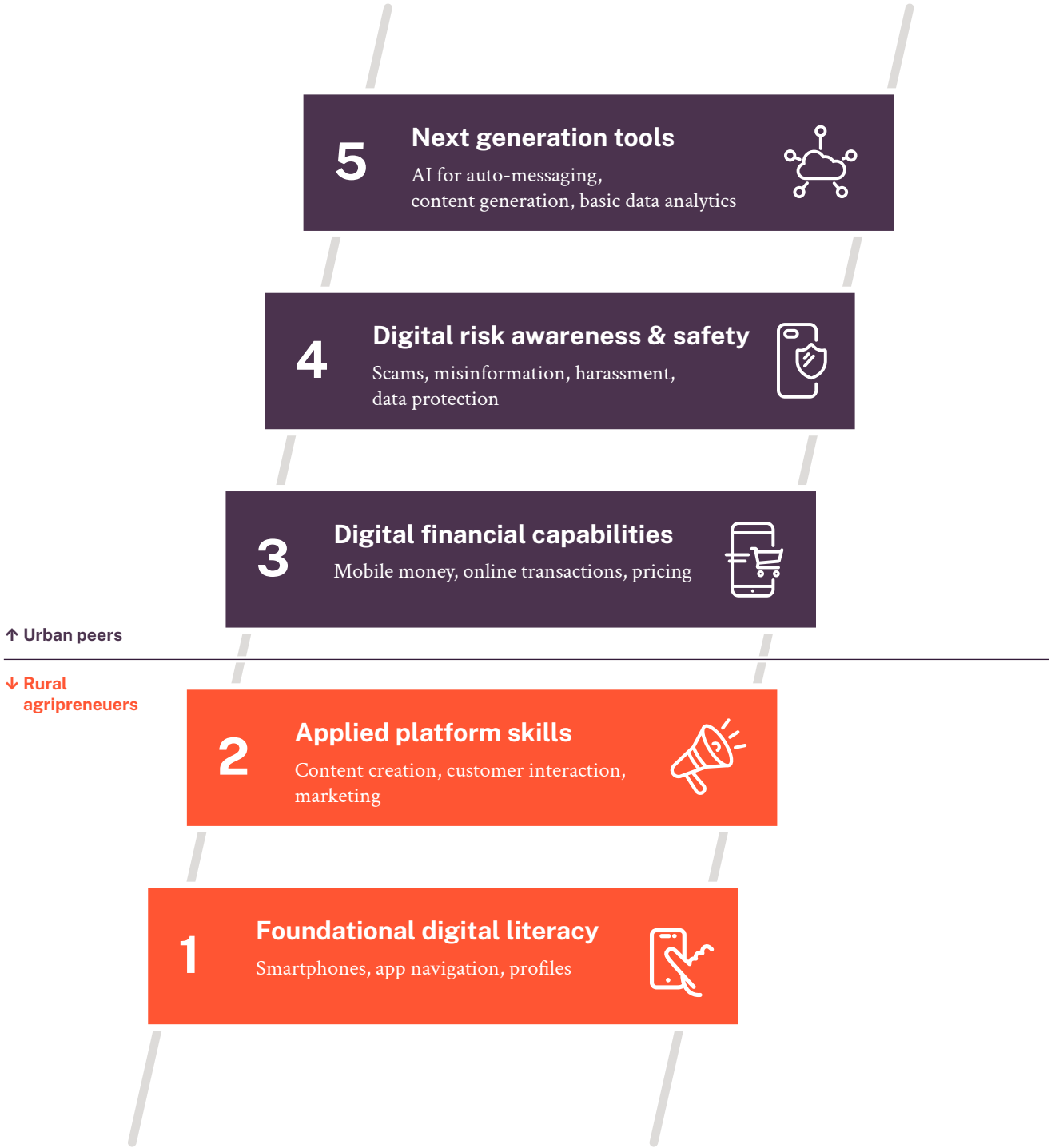
5. **Next-generation digital tools:** Introductory use of AI for auto-messaging and content generation and applying basic data analytics to inform marketing, pricing, and production decisions, underscoring the need for ongoing peer learning and mentorship.

These skills are particularly critical for women and youth who operate outside formal value chains and depend on informal markets where digital risks are heightened. Social agriculture also requires continuous adaptation to platform changes, algorithm shifts, and evolving customer behaviours.

51 Okonkwo, "Digital Inclusion in Africa."

FIGURE 4

Skills ladder



Pathways to digital upskilling

Across urban, peri-urban, and rural contexts, agriculture value chain actors emphasize that digital upskilling is only effective when it is practical, accessible, and peer-led. Many prefer video tutorials or content in local languages over formal classroom-style sessions, which often feel abstract or disconnected from their day-to-day realities. Alongside technical skills, agripreneurs highlight the need for entrepreneurial guidance on how to manage a social media page effectively, build a recognizable brand, and tell compelling stories that attract customers.

> "Just publishing isn't enough, it needs to be attractive. When I see others' videos, I realize how much more I need to learn.
>
> **Woman agripreneur,** peri-urban Côte d'Ivoire

Learning is often iterative, shaped by peer examples and adaptation. Focus groups highlighted the importance of combining theory with coaching:

> "The best way is to combine support with theoretical training, with three to six months of coaching.
>
> **BeniBiz graduate,** Benin

This highlights the widespread demand for mentorship and coaching, which enable agripreneurs to refine their skills in real time and adapt strategies to evolving market conditions.

Rural agripreneurs tend to prioritize basic competencies such as taking clear product photos, communicating with customers, and avoiding scams. With few formal opportunities, many rely on trial and error or peer-to-peer learning, often constrained by language barriers. Women, in particular, depend on voice notes or local-language content, leaving them excluded from more advanced training. Where training does exist, evidence shows its impact can be transformative. Practical instruction can expand market reach and increase sales.

> "The training helped us know how to create a Facebook page, take product photos, and post them to attract buyers.
>
> **Woman processor,** Benin

Training opportunities are expanding, but risk excluding rural women

A growing ecosystem of actors is emerging these skill gaps. In Côte d'Ivoire, the National Institute for Agricultural Vocational Training (INFPA) integrates digital skills modules into its curriculum. Community-based initiatives such as MacSkills Côte d'Ivoire's "E-Agriculture and Digital Platforms" programme,[52] offer short, practical courses in mobile marketing, online sales, and digital finance, often the first structured learning many agripreneurs access.

In Benin, Blolab's École 229 builds foundational digital skills for youth,[53] while the Centre d'Actions pour l'Environnement et le Développement Durable (ACED) trains farmers on digital platforms for visibility and market access.[54] Regionally, donor-funded programmes such as Skills for Africa deliver flexible, short-term training on e-commerce, GIS, digital payments, and traceability, skills increasingly relevant for those participating in digitally mediated trade.

> "We had a session on Instagram marketing, learning how to make our products look good and reach more people in the city.

Irène, processor, urban Benin

Despite this momentum, critical gaps remain. Most training remains urban-based and assumes a baseline of digital confidence that many rural women and youth do not yet have. Household responsibilities and language barriers further constrain engagement.[55] As a result, many continue to rely on informal learning, which, while resourceful, often reinforces existing inequalities.

New job roles are emerging from social agriculture

Social agriculture is not only strengthening individual businesses but also creating entirely new forms of work across Côte d'Ivoire and Benin. As agripreneurs increasingly use social media platforms, they generate demand for specialized roles that extend beyond traditional farm labour. These opportunities cluster in three main areas:

- **Digital marketing and communication:** Roles such as content creators, social media managers, community managers, and digital marketing specialists.

52 Macskills Training and Development Institute, "E-Agriculture and Digital Platforms for Agribusiness Training Course in Côte d'Ivoire."
53 École 229, *L'impact: Magazine d'informations*.
54 École 229, ACED, *Profil de l'agriculture numérique et de l'adaptation aux changements climatiques*.
55 UN Women, *Opportunities for Youth in Rural Business and Entrepreneurship in Agriculture*.

- **Training, support, and ecosystem services:** Roles such as mentors, coaches, digital trainers, and safety advisors who build capacity across communities.
- **AI integration and data services:** Though still nascent, early adoption of AI in social agriculture will create demand for roles including chatbot developers, data analysts, and CRM specialists who support customer engagement and market intelligence.

Alongside these demand-driven roles, a distinct type of work has also taken shape: **agriinfluencers**. Unlike service providers who meet the needs of other agripreneurs, agriinfluencers represent a self-generated job pathway within social agriculture, underscoring how digital platforms are enabling new forms of agricultural work that would not have existed a decade ago.

Such roles are increasingly recognized as part of Africa's digital jobs landscape. The International Finance Corporation projects that the digital economy could generate up to 230 million jobs by 2030, many of them in training and support functions.[56] As one processor in Côte d'Ivoire explained after a training, "*People started asking me to help set up their Facebook pages because they saw how mine was attracting buyers.*" This illustrates how digital skills acquired for farming often spill over into new micro-enterprises that support wider rural communities.

Recognizing these roles within national digital economy strategies is essential to ensure that training systems, certification schemes, and investment frameworks reflect the realities of how youth and women are generating livelihoods in agriculture's digital transition.

56 IFC, *Digital Skills in Sub-Saharan Africa: Spotlight on Ghana: Executive Summary*.

THE SOCIAL AGRICULTURE ECOSYSTEM IS EXPANDING, BUT POOR DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND FRAGMENTATION UNDERMINE ITS POTENTIAL

> "Everyone is organizing themselves; we have our own groups, but there is not always a big plan behind it. We need more connection between what the NGOs, the cooperatives, and the government are doing.

Cooperative leader, rural Côte d'Ivoire

Social agriculture in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin is expanding, but its potential is undermined by poor digital infrastructure and a fragmented support ecosystem. Agripreneurs are organizing themselves into groups and clusters, drawing attention from NGOs and public institutions, but access remains uneven. Mobile-first connectivity has grown rapidly in both countries, but rural youth and women, in particular, continue to face steep barriers to meaningful digital participation.

Poor network coverage, unreliable electricity, and high device and data costs prevent consistent engagement. In Benin, roughly 11% of rural residents, compared to the national average of 36.4%, have access to electricity, making device charging a daily challenge.[57] In 2024, the cost of a basic data plan (approximately 1 GB) corresponded to 5.67% of the GNI per capita, well above the recommended threshold.[58] A 2020 rapid assessment of e-commerce readiness in Benin by UNCTAD also noted that the cost of low-volume data (less than 1 GB) is 30% to 50% higher in Benin than in six of the seven other WAEMU countries.[59]

Across sub-Saharan Africa, although mobile internet coverage is expanding, rural adults are 49% less likely to use it than their urban peers, and women face an additional 37% usage gap.[60] The median cost of an entry-level phone with internet access in 2021 represented more than 25.2% of monthly GDP per capita.

> "In the village, it's too expensive to use data all the time, and many women don't have good phones. So we are left out.

Woman agripreneur, rural Benin

57 EnDev, "Benin."
58 Internet Society, "Country Report for Benin."
59 UNCTAD, *Bénin: Evaluation rapide de l'état de préparation au commerce électronique.*
60 Shanahan, "Despite Improvements, Sub-Saharan Africa Has the Widest Usage and Coverage Gaps Worldwide."

Most rural youth navigate digital markets with basic feature phones or low-end smartphones, which limit their ability to upload photos, create videos, or use advisory apps. High prepaid data costs further restrict access. Women face the steepest barriers due to limited device ownership and household constraints. Despite growing interest in digital tools, these infrastructure and affordability gaps continue to hinder meaningful participation in social agriculture.

> "As much as I want to show my products, my camera is too old or there's no signal.
>
> **Woman agripreneur,** rural Benin

The fragmented ecosystem limits scaling and inclusion

Even where connectivity allows engagement, agripreneurs find themselves navigating a patchwork of poorly coordinated initiatives. Government agencies, NGOs, incubators, and digital platforms offer a range of services, from digital skills training to e-commerce support. But most programmes remain pilot-driven and urban-focused. Duplication in some areas contrasts with complete absence in others, leaving resources unevenly distributed.

> "Some groups receive training many times, while others don't know what other groups are getting, so some people are left out.
>
> **Participant,** rural Côte d'Ivoire

Stakeholder mapping (Tables 4 and 5) shows that while numerous actors offer digital skills training, device funding, or mentorship, these services are not systematically accessible.

This fragmentation also undermines opportunities for scale. NGOs, cooperatives, and local institutions rarely share resources or link their digital initiatives, leaving producers isolated rather than connected to larger markets. Instead of reinforcing and building on one another, most initiatives remain fragmented. This prevents agripreneurs from accessing the kind of holistic, modular support that could meet them where they are and support them to progress over time.

TYPE OF TRAINING	TRAINING PROVIDERS	TRAINING CONTENT	FORMAT/DELIVERY METHOD
Introduction to social media	• Agricultural training centres • Local NGOs (ProAgro, DigiQueen cluster) • Private ICT providers	• Creating and managing Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram accounts • Basic security	• In-person workshops • Webinars • Video tutorials
Digital marketing strategies	• Development NGOs (GIZ, TechnoServe) • Entrepreneur clusters • Communication agencies	• Product promotion • Visual content creation • Managing ads (boosting) • Storytelling	• Online sessions • WhatsApp groups • Case studies
Sales and prospecting via social media	• Agricultural cooperatives • Women's entrepreneur associations • Independent consultants	• Customer prospecting • Managing sales groups • Responding to online orders	• Practical demos • Role playing • Experience sharing
Security and digital identity management	• DigiQueen cluster • Local incubators • Cybersecurity NGOs • Independent IT experts	• Fraud prevention • Privacy protection • Managing fake accounts	• Interactive training • Video capsules
Access to sectoral information	• Chambers of agriculture • Professional networks • Multi-stakeholder projects • Consultancy firms	• Researching opportunities • Competitive intelligence • Price/market monitoring	• Tutorials • Exchanges in social groups
Innovation and monitoring of new tools	• Tech hubs • Young agripreneur clusters • Specialized ICT startups	• Adopting new platforms (TikTok, Instagram Reels) • Using supporting applications	• Hybrid workshops • Demonstration presentations

TABLE 4

Stakeholder mapping by training type

> "Cooperatives, NGOs, and local institutions each run separate digital trainings, but we rarely share resources or connect rural producers to big markets together.
>
> **NGO representative,** Benin

TABLE 5 (NEXT PAGE)

Stakeholder mapping by organization

ORGANIZATION	INITIATIVES	GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT	CHALLENGES
Map Afrique	• Digital app in development for farm management, real-time information, and market connectivity • **MapConnect**: online sales and networking platform for entrepreneurs (app in progress) • Use of AI tools like ChatGPT for content, marketing, and publicity • Pilot of a gamified learning tool for agriculture and entrepreneurship • Collaboration with AgriMarket, Azeket, Digital Sumil, Canadian agri-tech companies	• Pilots target urban (Abidjan) and peri-urban entrepreneurs first	• Funding • Digital literacy • Device/internet access • Tailoring to local contexts
IECD	• Partnership with JOLI, Ivorian agri-food sales digital platform • Practical support for market linkages using digital methods/platforms • Collaboration with Orange Fab for digital skills awareness (via curriculum addons) • Incubator for agri-food transformation with some digital focus	• Digital incubator and JOLI platform linkages in Abidjan	• Limited digital/AI in formal educational curricula • Interest and tech access gap
Goshen Impact International	• Developing an online training platform for practical agri-skills, including digitized/virtual sessions • Collaborated on a pilot with FICA, a digital ag-training app for rural contexts • Developing digital modules in partnership with international digital strategy institute • Use of digital and mobile payment tools in value chains • Digital advisory communities for ongoing support	• Targeting both peri-urban and urban Abidjan • Apps/platforms piloted for wider region	• Funding • Internet access for platform scale-up • Digital literacy • Language inclusivity
Inades Formation	• Digitization of training materials (library content to digital) • Video capsules for local dissemination • Use of WhatsApp for sharing information and peer support • Some experimentation with digital weather/climate info tools for agriculture	• Urban outreach ongoing • greater penetration in peri-urban/rural	• Resource/skills gaps • Lack of innovation partners • Limited digital penetration
ONG Bouge	• CEDEC-BOUGE ICT Center supporting digital literacy for vulnerable youth and women • Creation of digital groups/social networks for market linkages (WhatsApp/Messenger, Facebook) • HI Project: Digital inclusion for disabled youth • External digital experts brought in for modules	• Inclusive initiatives extend to urban Abidjan's vulnerable youth and women	• Device and data access • Youth vulnerability • Costs • Inclusion for disabilities
UCS	• Collaboration with FINAPAP/PROFINA for digital financial education and product marketing • Support for producer-led digital networking (market linkages) • Collaboration with Afokatam factory for digital supply/buy interface	• Some urban entrepreneurial focus, broadly region-wide	• Lack of showcase digital models • Knowledge gaps • Digital adoption lag
SNV	• WhatsApp clusters for marketing and peer exchange among farmer/entrepreneur groups • Partnership with Bioani (Black Soldier Fly composting, digital extension tools) • Pilot group marketing initiatives using WhatsApp, audio communication for illiterate users	• Urban (Abidjan) clusters and young women/men • Digital market pilots	• Limited digital/AI beyond WhatsApp • Data and device affordability

“Together, we transform challenges into opportunities.

PROFILE

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 as their WhatsApp status, check prices with peers before travelling, and fulfil orders placed via WhatsApp by sending products via bus.

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.

The consequences of this fragmentation are particularly gendered. In some communities, women face resistance to public digital engagement. As a result, digital participation becomes limited to trusted group spaces, cutting women off from wider exposure, opportunity, and institutional engagement.

> "Most of the men in my family don't support us posting online. They say it's not for women.

Woman processor, rural Benin

These local realities reflect a broader policy gap. National digital strategies in WAEMU countries often focus on urban economic modernization and enterprise development, while overlooking rural connectivity, gender equity, and agricultural integration.[61] Without deliberate coordination and inclusion strategies, the fragmented nature of the ecosystem will continue to limit who can benefit from social agriculture and how far it can scale.

Digital presence is creating new pathways to institutional support

Amid ongoing infrastructure and ecosystem challenges, digital visibility is emerging as a new route into formal support systems. As agripreneurs build an online presence on platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn, they increasingly catch the attention of NGOs, funders, and government agencies. Institutions are beginning to view these digitally active youth not only as promising entrepreneurs but also as credible intermediaries for disseminating agricultural information and extending advisory reach.

> "It was after sharing my successes online that international programs invited us to join their training.

Brigitte, woman agripreneur, peri-urban Benin

Several agripreneurs described how posting online opened doors that would otherwise have remained closed to them. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire one entrepreneur was discovered by a foreign foundation through LinkedIn and subsequently received training and equipment. By monitoring digital spaces, ministries are finding new ways to identify and engage promising agripreneurs who might otherwise remain invisible to formal systems.

> "We now track Facebook pages and WhatsApp groups to spot innovative farmers and connect them with support programs.

Official, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries, Benin

61 CIRAD, "Digital Adoption in West African Agriculture."

> Our goal is to engage agripreneurs who are active online and help them scale up through technical assistance and grants.

Representative, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Côte d'Ivoire

Yet this pathway remains highly selective. Visibility depends on the ability to stay consistently online, create content, and manage an active presence — all of which require a reliable connection, modern devices, and digital confidence. Rural agripreneurs, particularly women, who face persistent barriers in these areas remain effectively invisible to formal actors. Without targeted strategies to close these gaps, social media will continue to serve as an institutional bridge for only a connected minority.

SOCIAL MEDIA IS SHAPING NEW ACCESS TO FINANCE PATHWAYS FOR AGRIPRENEURS

> The banks ask for guarantees we don't have. But online, people help because they see your work.

Konan, processor, Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire

Social media is emerging as a vital enabler of informal financial access for youth and women agripreneurs across Côte d'Ivoire and Benin. These platforms offer new channels to mobilize finance through community-based crowdfunding. While global narratives around creator monetization often focus on advertising revenue, branded content, or platform payouts, the financial opportunities unlocked by social agriculture in WAEMU follow a different path, rooted in trust, visibility, and peer support. These behaviours reflect the economic realities of agripreneurs who are often excluded from traditional finance and underserved by formal lending.

Exclusion from formal finance remains stark.[62] Only 13.8% of adults in Côte d'Ivoire hold bank accounts. In Benin, only 16% of women hold bank accounts and fewer than one in three women report having used mobile money.[63] While mobile money acts as a foundational layer supporting micro-enterprise development and trust-building in informal digital markets,[64] usage gaps driven by data and device affordability, rural agent networks, identification barriers, and digital literacy limit women's ability to fully participate.[65]

Against this backdrop, agripreneurs are using social media as both a marketplace and a noticeboard, transforming visibility into a trust-building mechanism. Posts that document work, explain funding needs, or share personal stories often attract financial contributions from peers, community members, and even strangers.

> "Often, generosity comes from afar: on Facebook, even people I don't know helped me buy a new machine.
>
> **Young agripreneur,** urban Côte d'Ivoire

> "When I wanted to buy a sprayer, I made a video, posted it on Facebook, and donations followed.
>
> **Young agripreneur,** rural Benin

Diasporic connections are particularly important. Migrant relatives and former community members, moved by visible updates, frequently contribute small amounts that collectively finance equipment purchases or small-scale expansions. These practices reflect a shift: agripreneurs are not waiting for platforms to monetize their content, but instead are leveraging content to mobilize community-based crowdfunding.

62 World Bank, "Global Findex Database 2021 Benin."
63 Lardies et al., "African Women Have Less Access to the Internet than African Men Do. That's a Problem."
64 Caribou, *The Platform Livelihoods Project*.
65 GSMA, *State of the Industry Report on Mobile Money 2023*.

Crowdfunding in Senegal A difference in scale and strategy

While crowdfunding is gaining traction across WAEMU as a tool for agricultural finance, its use in Senegal reflects a more formalized and strategic approach than that currently seen in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin.

In Senegal, agripreneurs like the founder of Agrosine, a horticultural enterprise involved in produce sales, agricultural management, land leasing, and agribusiness consulting, use social media platforms, including LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok, to run multi-round, investor-oriented crowdfunding campaigns. These campaigns are structured and supported by influencers and include regular investor updates. This crowdfunding model has enabled Agrosine to scale significantly, expanding operations from 5 to 250 hectares and creating 50 direct jobs.[66]

In contrast, crowdfunding efforts in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin are largely informal, individually led, and centred on peer-to-peer support rather than formal investment mobilization. While all rely on trust and visibility, Senegal's model reflects stronger institutional readiness, digital financial fluency, and strategic use of online reputation to unlock larger-scale capital.

66 Caribou, *Cultivating Connections: How Social Media Powers Post-Production in Senegal's Agriculture Sector.*

Platform monetization holds promise but is out of reach for most agripreneurs

Globally, social media platform monetization is framed as a core opportunity for digital creators to earn directly through advertising revenue, branded content, subscriptions, or fan contributions.[67] Yet for agripreneurs across WAEMU these options remain largely aspirational. None of the agripreneurs interviewed for this study had received platform payouts, even those surpassing engagement thresholds. Several barriers explain this gap:

- **Eligibility hurdles.** Meeting minimum thresholds of followers or watch time remains out of reach for most rural agripreneurs.
- **Payment exclusions.** TikTok's Creator Fund excludes much of sub-Saharan Africa, while Facebook and YouTube rely on PayPal or bank transfers that are inaccessible to many.
- **Lack of mobile money integration.** Despite its centrality in West Africa, most platforms do not integrate with mobile money systems.
- **Language and policy barriers.** Guidance is often only in English, and regulatory frameworks for digital earnings in francophone West Africa remain unclear.

> "I have many followers, but I don't know how to get paid from Facebook. People just see my products and contact me to buy.
>
> **Youth agripreneur,** peri-urban Côte d'Ivoire

> "I post regularly and have a lot of people following my page, but I don't understand how to earn money directly from Facebook like influencers do.
>
> **Fatoumata,** Parakou, Benin

Experiences within the Agriinfluencer Network (AiN) highlight regional disparities. Prominent AiN agriinfluencers in francophone West Africa have yet to benefit directly from platform monetization. Three leading members from Burkina Faso and Senegal have a cumulative reach of more than 750,000 followers across platforms, underscoring the scale of influence that remains disconnected from formal monetization opportunities in the region. While a small number of anglophone members have been able to monetize their platforms, these remain the exception. Differences in payment integration, regulatory clarity, and language support continue to place francophone agripreneurs at a disadvantage.

67 Fadashe, "On NewComma, Africa's Diasporan Creators Earn and Find Community on a Global Stage."

At the same time, a parallel African creator economy is emerging, projected to reach $20 billion annually by 2030, creating up to 20 million jobs. Startups like NewComma and Circo are beginning to fill monetization gaps by offering localized payment options (such as Paystack), digital currencies, and creator analytics tools. However, these innovations are concentrated in urban, anglophone contexts and have yet to extend meaningfully to agripreneurs in WAEMU.[68]

AGRIPRENEURS ARE NAVIGATING TRUST-BUILDING WITH CUSTOMERS WHILE MANAGING DIGITAL FRAUD RISKS

> "People watch my updates, see my work, and order directly by messaging me. The trust grows when they can follow the process.

Konan, processor, Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire

Trust has become a form of digital currency for agripreneurs in WAEMU, shaping both how they share information and how they conduct transactions. In contexts where formal systems of verification, guarantees, or dispute resolution are limited, trust is what makes digital agriculture work. It is hard-earned, easily broken, and especially critical for youth and women, who are more vulnerable to fraud, misinformation, and reputational harm.

Two intersecting dimensions define this landscape: trust in the accuracy of information and trust in the security of transactions.

Trust in information: Building credibility and managing misinformation

Agripreneurs use social media to demonstrate transparency and establish credibility. Regular updates — photos of fields, harvests, processing stages, or customer feedback — signal reliability and build relationships.

> "We post our fields and the difficulties we encounter. Sometimes advice from WhatsApp saves me from a big loss.

Producer, rural Côte d'Ivoire

68 Fadashe, "On NewComma, Africa's Diasporan Creators Earn and Find Community on a Global Stage."

These practices are reshaping how agricultural knowledge circulates. WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, and TikTok videos are becoming peer-led extension spaces. Yet, the same networks that spread timely advice can also amplify misinformation on input use, pest management, or prices. With low digital literacy and strong peer influence, false content can spread quickly.[69]

Still, examples of resilience are emerging. In Bukumbé, Benin, WhatsApp groups that bring together farmers, traders, and extension officers share tips and coordinate input access and labour. Authentic and consistent content that shows both progress and setbacks humanizes producers and strengthens buyer confidence. Agripreneurs report that "showing the good and the bad" directly improves customer retention and referrals.

Trust in transactions: Managing fraud, security risks, and payment challenges

As payments increasingly move online, agripreneurs face heightened risks of fraud, impersonation, and content theft. Social platforms lack built-in verification mechanisms, pushing agripreneurs to adopt their own safeguards, such as posting "proof of delivery" photos, conducting live video calls with buyers, and maintaining high visibility through regular updates. Peer-based protection systems have also developed. WhatsApp groups serve as informal watchdogs, circulating warnings about fraudulent actors.

> "When I post proof of delivery on my status, it reassures others, and more buyers call. Trust is built quicker online than waiting for them to come and see you at the stall.

Moussa Toko, processor, urban Benin

> "In our WhatsApp group, if someone cheats, their number is immediately blocked, and everyone is warned.

Agripreneur, urban Côte d'Ivoire

Without formal protections, agripreneurs often bear the financial and emotional costs of failed transactions. These costs are unevenly distributed: young women face disproportionate exposure to harassment, impersonation, and reputational damage. As Caribou's research in Senegal shows, a single negative comment can undermine a digital reputation, especially when trust is tied to an individual's online identity, with immediate consequences for income and growth.[70]

69 Alan Turing Institute, *Understanding Vulnerability to Online Misinformation*.

70 Alan Turing Institute, *Understanding Vulnerability to Online Misinformation*.

Informal mechanisms of trust building, peer networks, visible transparency, and community-led fraud monitoring are keeping digital markets functional. Yet these protections remain fragile. Weak verification systems, poor connectivity, and uneven digital skills still leave many vulnerable. For agripreneurs using social media as their primary sales channel, a compromised reputation can quickly lead to lost income and stalled growth.[71]

AI IS EMERGING AS A NEW LAYER IN THE SOCIAL AGRICULTURE LANDSCAPE AMONG URBAN YOUTH

Artificial intelligence: A nascent frontier

> "Young people do not master AI here … but WhatsApp, we use every day for our work and information.

Agripreneur, rural Benin

Artificial intelligence (AI) is beginning to surface in the digital practices of agripreneurs across Côte d'Ivoire and Benin, but its integration is uneven and limited. Rather than being a widespread tool, AI is emerging as a supplementary layer among urban and peri-urban youth, offering time-saving and practical digital support in the everyday realities of social agriculture. Early exposure is largely driven by urban-based training programs such as the AI Tech Camps in Côte d'Ivoire delivered by Cybastion in partnership with Cisco and government agencies introducing youth and public officials to AI concepts, with a focus on agriculture.[72] Regionally, initiatives like iAfrica's AI for Agriculture Learning Pathway are beginning to develop content tailored to local value chains.[73] However, these are largely urban-focused and disconnected from the practical realities of social agriculture.

71 Caribou, *Cultivating Connections: How Social Media Powers Post-Production in Senegal's Agriculture Sector.*

72 Cybastion, "Cybastion Highlights Advancing AI Skills and Digital Training at Côte d'Ivoire's National AI Conference."

73 iAfrica, "AI for Agriculture Learning Pathway."

Urban and peri-urban agripreneurs are beginning to use AI for practical business needs

Among early adopters, AI is used less as a complex innovation and more as a practical assistant for routine digital tasks. Tools like Canva AI and ChatGPT are elevating marketing quality and brand presence.

> "With Canva AI, I quickly create attractive designs for my flyers and social media posts, it saves me a lot of time.
>
> **Moussa Toko,** processor, urban Benin

Similarly, agripreneurs are using AI tools to write product descriptions and Facebook ads, improving the professionalism of their online storefronts. Enhanced digital branding plays a crucial role in boosting the visibility and competitiveness of youth-led agribusinesses across West Africa.[74] AI-powered design and copywriting tools improve marketing quality and efficiency, lowering barriers for small enterprises to compete effectively in digital markets.[75] Some use AI to customize product packaging or automate social media engagement.

> "I use AI to generate labels for soy milk bottles and draft my marketing content.
>
> **Brigitte,** woman agripreneur, peri-urban Benin

> "I asked ChatGPT to find a catchy name for my new cashew juice, and it worked.
>
> **Processor,** peri-urban Benin

AI tools also support business planning; several agripreneurs described using chatbots to help calculate costs and profits before launching new products. "*I use apps to help me calculate costs and profits before launching a new snack product. Now I feel more organized*," shared one agripreneur.

While not specific to social agriculture, it is worth mentioning that some agripreneurs have begun experimenting with mobile AI tools designed to diagnose plant diseases and support crop health management. Although these examples are rare, they illustrate the potential for AI to assist with complex agricultural challenges beyond marketing and business planning. Arnold, a peri-urban producer, reflected on his experience: "*I tried an AI tool to diagnose my plants. It's quick, but I think I'd need more training to really use it well*."

74 GSMA, *AI for Africa: Use Cases Delivering Impact*.
75 OECD, *Artificial Intelligence in Society*.

This disconnect is not due to lack of interest, but rather a mismatch between the design of AI tools and the lived realities of agripreneurs. WhatsApp and Facebook remain the digital backbone of social agriculture; AI tools that fail to integrate with these familiar platforms risk being overlooked.

> AI, because it's a trend ... answer the questions you ask him in two to three minutes. He answers you quickly ... But most people here just use WhatsApp, they don't know these new things.

Young agripreneur, rural Côte d'Ivoire

If AI is to support inclusive digital agriculture, it must meet agripreneurs where they are. Rather than asking youth and women to adapt to new platforms, AI should be embedded into the digital spaces they already use every day, like WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok. Simple integrations, such as translation, content generation, or advisory features, would make AI tools far more accessible. Without this alignment, AI risks staying peripheral, confined to urwban youth with training access, instead of becoming a meaningful driver of agricultural livelihoods across West Africa.

"Quality keeps customers coming back.

PROFILE

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.

Recommendations for action

Drawing on evidence from across Côte d'Ivoire and Benin, this study highlights tangible opportunities to strengthen social agriculture as a driver of inclusive employment, particularly for youth and women. While broader investments in rural connectivity, device affordability, and internet access remain foundational to digital inclusion, the following recommendations focus on the distinct behaviours, tools, and support needs that define social agriculture.

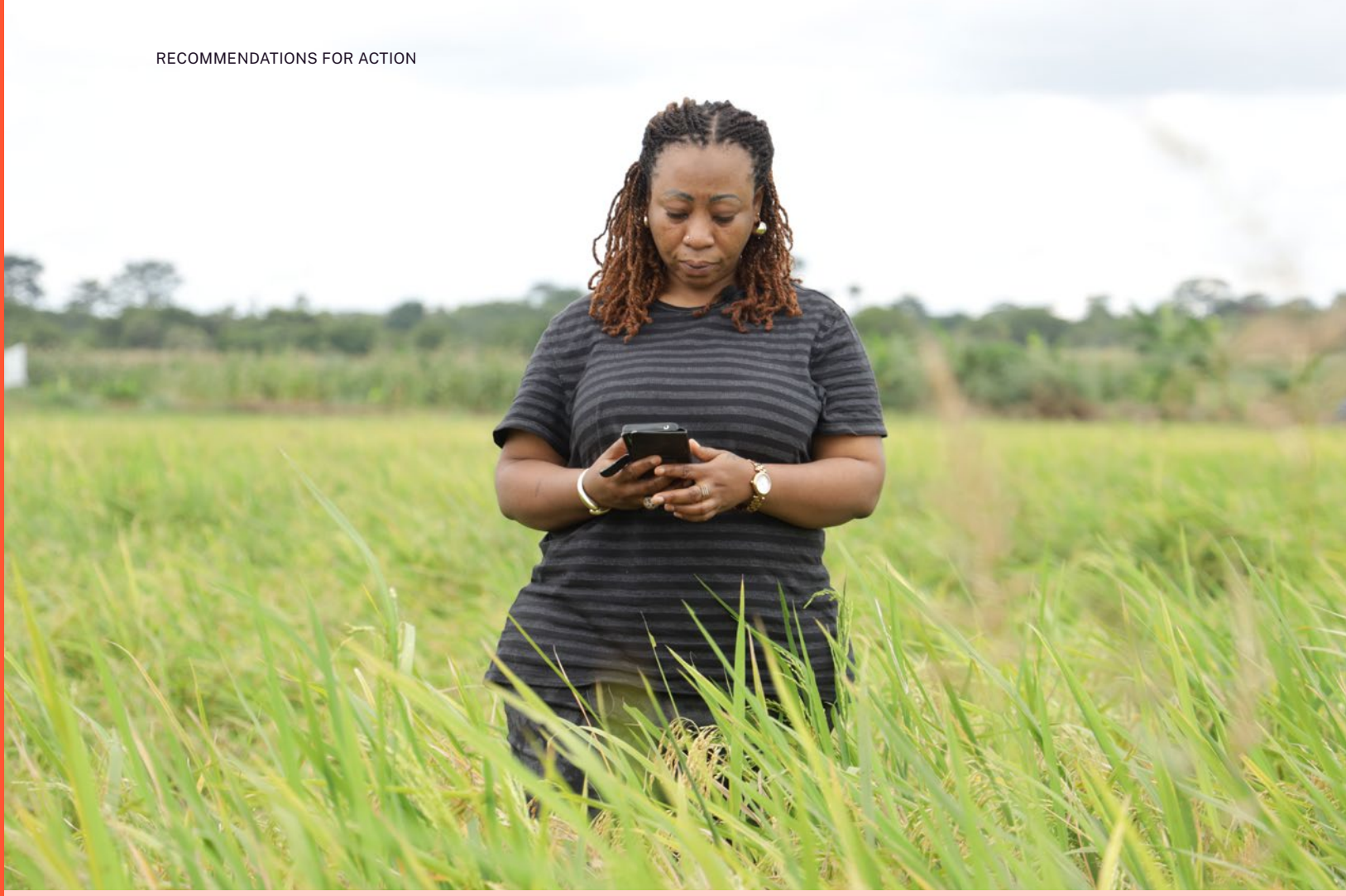
These actions are tailored to four key ecosystem actor groups:

- Governments, policymakers, and regulators
- Development partners, NGOs, training institutions, and research institutions
- Farmer groups and cooperatives
- Private sector actors, including agribusiness incubators, agritech companies, fintech companies, telecom operators, and social media platforms

CROSS-CUTTING RECOMMENDATIONS

While responsibilities for different ecosystem actors vary, a coordinated and inclusive ecosystem is essential for social agriculture to reach its full potential. The following cross-cutting actions require joint commitment.

- **Establish coordination mechanisms between multiple ecosystem actors.** Social agriculture requires coordination across policy, practice, and markets. Governments, particularly ministries of agriculture and ICT, should convene national working groups on social agriculture that bring together development partners, NGOs, training institutions, farmer groups, and private sector actors. These groups should align programmes, avoid duplication, and set standards on trust building, content ethics, digital safety, and responsible platform use in social agriculture. To strengthen accountability, governments should develop national dashboards to track programmes, investments, and institutional initiatives that enable the social agriculture ecosystem. Crucially, youth agripreneurs should be co-designers to ensure relevance and uptake.
- **Enable affordable data and device access for rural youth and women.** Public–private initiatives should focus on three levers: expanding access to devices through financing schemes, hubs, and refurbished distribution; reducing recurring costs through subsidized rural data bundles; and incentivizing inclusive business models that extend beyond urban centres. Telecom operators and fintech companies can lead on phone financing and micro-lending, while agribusiness incubators and cooperatives can host device-sharing hubs. Governments should reinforce these efforts by lowering import duties on smartphones and supporting rural distribution channels. Together, these measures can reduce cost burdens and unlock wider participation in social agriculture.
- **Partner with influential agripreneurs to strengthen extension and outreach.** Governments, NGOs, development partners, and agritech companies all provide extension services, yet their reach is often limited by resources, geography, or language. Agriinfluencers can complement these systems by translating technical guidance into practical, accessible content, amplifying advisory messages, and mobilizing peer learning on social media. By engaging them strategically, ecosystem actors can extend extension services to reach the millions of agripreneurs who follow them online.
- **Expand rural connectivity and align with rural electrification initiatives.** Governments and telecom regulators should prioritize rural coverage within broadband strategies and digital economy policies, setting clear agriculture-specific targets. A portion of Universal Service Funds should be ring-fenced for rural connectivity expansion, ensuring resources reach farming communities, with transparent mechanisms to ensure delivery. Connectivity expansion must be coordinated with rural electrification, linking ICT and energy ministries to enable reliable power supply. Solar-powered digital hubs in off-grid areas can serve as sustainable access points, creating the infrastructural support needed for social agriculture to thrive.



“Financing farmers is the key to transforming rice into opportunity.

PROFILE

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.

DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS, NGOS, TRAINING INSTITUTIONS, AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

- **Scale peer-led, platform-relevant training and mentorship.** Expand peer-led training models that reflect the mobile-first, platform-based realities of rural agripreneurs. Training should be practical, low-literacy friendly, and delivered in local languages on social media platforms. A core curriculum should build five key domains:

  - Foundational digital literacy
    smartphone use, app navigation, digital profiles)
  - Applied platform skills
    (content creation, customer engagement, online marketing)
  - Digital financial capabilities
    (digital payments, pricing, transaction management)
  - Digital risk awareness and platform safety
    (fraud prevention, safeguarding, online credibility)
  - Next-generation digital tools, including AI for auto-messaging and content generation, as well as basic data analytics for marketing and decision-making

  Structured mentorship cycles, as demonstrated by the AiN model, can complement these efforts by building digital fluency and confidence, particularly among women.

- **Engage women's digital groups as safe spaces for upskilling.** Partner with grassroots women's groups to create inclusive spaces for learning. These environments foster experimentation, confidence, and knowledge sharing among women exploring digital tools for the first time.

- **Establish influencer partnerships to validate information shared online.** Engage with agriinfluencers to create mechanisms that validate and safeguard the knowledge shared through social platforms. This includes testing influencer-generated content against agronomic best practices, co-developing fact-checking protocols with research institutions, and translating validated insights into practical guides and advisory materials for farmers. This approach reduces risks such as misinformation and strengthens their credibility and the impact of social agriculture.

- **Expand the research base through quantitative and inclusive methods.** Fund and conduct studies that provide a rigorous evidence base for social agriculture. This should include quantitative surveys to measure reach, income impact, and productivity gains, alongside longitudinal studies to track how digital practices evolve and cost-benefit analyses comparing informal digital strategies with traditional support models. To strengthen regional policy harmonization, research should expand to additional WAEMU countries and explore more value chains (e.g., horticulture, livestock, cassava). Approaches must also be intersectional and inclusive,

integrating the experiences of women, youth with disabilities, rural migrants, and displaced youth, while assessing how digital norms affect intra-household power dynamics.

GOVERNMENTS, POLICYMAKERS, AND REGULATORS

- **Integrate social agriculture into national youth and digital economy strategies.**
  Formally recognize agripreneurs as contributors to employment and food security and ensure their inclusion in agricultural, entrepreneurship and digital economy programmes led by ministries of agriculture, digital economy, and youth/employment. Support for the new digital job roles emerging from social agriculture should be embedded in national digital skills frameworks, with funding for certification and mentorship schemes that open higher-value opportunities for women and youth.
- **Enable inclusive monetization and financial participation.**
  Work with social media platforms, fintechs, and regulators to simplify income-generation pathways. Support mobile money–compatible payouts and light-touch reporting systems to enable small-scale sellers to earn and comply without excessive barriers.
- **Strengthen digital identity systems and fraud protection mechanisms.**
  Increase access to foundational identity documents required for mobile money and platform registration, especially for rural women. Explore ways to align informal verification practices (e.g., peer-based trust networks) with formal digital identity and consumer protection systems.

FARMER GROUPS AND COOPERATIVES

- **Build group capacity for digital engagement.**
  Form digital focal teams to manage group social media pages and profiles. Broker links to local training providers and market access initiatives that support digital visibility and income generation.
- **Formalize peer alerts and buyer verification mechanisms.**
  Use WhatsApp or Facebook group features to build trust networks, flagging suspicious actors, maintaining verified buyer lists, and reducing exposure to digital fraud within cooperative communities.
- **Train members in digital fundraising and crowdfunding.**
  Support groups to tell their stories, structure online appeals, and build donor trust, especially among diaspora audiences active on social platforms.

PRIVATE SECTOR: AGRITECH COMPANIES, SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS, INVESTORS, AND INCUBATORS

- **Integrate digital tools into platforms agripreneurs already use.**
  Design AI and digital tools that plug into platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook, where agripreneurs are already active. Prioritize mobile-first, offline-capable features that support local languages and work in low-bandwidth environments.
- **Adapt monetization systems to local financial realities.**
  Social media platforms should allow earnings via mobile money and ease onboarding for users without bank accounts. Fintechs should build backend systems for payments, income tracking, and reporting tailored to informal agripreneurs.
- **Support content-driven agripreneurship models.**
  Investors and incubators should back agripreneurs who use social platforms for education, storytelling, and community building, not just app developers. Offer mentorship, financing, and tools to help them grow audiences and diversify income streams.

CALL TO ACTION:

From informal potential to inclusive transformation

The insights captured in this report reveal a quiet revolution unfolding in the fields and markets of Côte d'Ivoire and Benin. Young agripreneurs and women are not waiting for formal support structures — they are leveraging social media and digital tools to redefine how agriculture works, who participates, and who benefits. Yet this transformation remains fragile.

Social agriculture represents more than an innovation trend. It is a response to structural exclusion from formal agricultural, financial, and advisory systems. Youth and women are building informal networks, markets, and learning systems through everyday digital platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook, often with limited resources and support. This resilience and ingenuity carry critical lessons for policymakers, funders, and practitioners alike.

Our findings underscore that, while adoption is widespread, disparities in access, skills, and support continue to constrain the full potential of social agriculture. From AI-driven content creation in urban centres to WhatsApp-based solidarity networks in rural villages, the spectrum of innovation is broad but uneven.

To transform this informal potential into inclusive transformation, coordinated action is essential. Rural connectivity must be expanded. Practical, inclusive training must move beyond urban hubs. Ecosystem actors — from ministries to NGOs — must adapt their programs to recognize and support informal digital actors. Agripreneurs need pathways to monetization, institutional support, and digital safety mechanisms to protect their livelihoods and build trust online.

For policymakers, the message is clear: social agriculture is no longer peripheral. It is shaping the present and future of youth engagement in agriculture. Investing in this space means investing in job creation, food security, and economic inclusion.

For development partners and private sector actors, supporting social agriculture is an opportunity to drive sustainable impact where it matters most — in the hands of young people and women shaping the agricultural economies of tomorrow.

In closing, this report calls for a reframing of digital agriculture in WAEMU: not only as a high-tech frontier, but also as a grassroots movement demanding attention, investment, and structured support. Social agriculture is already here. The question is whether stakeholders will recognize, value, and sustain its growth.

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