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## MAKING FARMING SEXY

Léonce Sessou

I am always happy whenever I come out of a video session," says Raymond, a 24-year old student at Songhai Centre, in Benin.

Raymond is the kind of young farmer that Benin and Africa desperately need, to renew an ageing farm population and to bring new ideas into agriculture. He is one of 650 students studying agribusiness at the centre. Video sessions provide Raymond and his friends with new knowledge and skills. More than that, they are developing their passion for agriculture. Farming has become sexy again for youth.

The Songhai Centre promotes environmentally friendly farming, renewable energy and agricultural services. Songhai finds ways to make better use of resources, through its integrated agriculture and waste-recycling system. Songhai strives to involve more young people in agriculture. Many are leaving rural areas, seeking jobs in cities because they think that farmers work too hard, use outmoded tools, and earn too little.

Songhai's training programmes promote technologies on soil fertilisation, mulching, irrigation, integrated pest management, food processing, and others that make agriculture more attractive to them. The training helps farmers to produce more with less, using local resources to produce goods and services for the rural communities. But to achieve this, the farmers of

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*Songhai thinks that farming should be interesting, profitable, and environmentally sound.*



*Youth will stay in agriculture if they can make some money from farming. Songhai shows Access Agriculture training videos once a week.*

tomorrow need to have good practical and business skills.

Videos capture the attention of student farmers. This is why we embed video sessions within the training at Songhai. Videos produced by Songhai and its partners, such as Access Agriculture, are downloaded and shown to the students twice a week. The videos show many different practices – from drip irrigation, to feeding snails, post-harvest, rice parboiling, and animal husbandry.

Every quarter, the centre’s communication team suggests a list of videos to the training department based on the curricula being developed. Trainers watch the videos before the sessions so that they can guide the learning process. After the students watch the videos, the trainer adds more information and responds to questions. The videos are entertaining and capture the attention of the students. The courses last 3 to 18 months, and at the end students are keen to return home and start applying what they’ve learned.

Raymond says that farming is becoming more attractive to youth. Videos play an important role in energising this new generation of entrepreneurs.

Videos make learning more entertaining. Students see profitable agricultural enterprises, while watching farmers apply best practices.

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Many farmers are leaving the land but new, young, fresh recruits are getting ready to take their places. Videos are helping the digital generation to see the fun and profitable side of farming.

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