

# Dangote initiative engages unemployed youth in rice farming

While Dangote Rice Limited prepares to hit the market with one million metric tonnes of Dangote rice in 2018, the company has launched a multi-million naira Youth Farming Initiative in Kogi State, set to engage unemployed Nigerian students in rice farming.



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The Dangote Youth Rice Farm project, mainly an out-grower scheme for youths only, was flagged off at the Lower Niger River Basin Authority, Kampe, Ejiba in Yagba West local government area of the state where youth have embarked on rice cultivation over 100 hectares of land. The rice farm project, which was preceded by a special training for the youth farmers on the dynamics of rice farming, will see the youths cultivating the rice paddy on 100 hectares of land, which will then be bought over by the company for processing.

Under the scheme, the Dangote Rice Company provides the seedling, anti-pest-chemicals, and fertilisers while the Basing Authority provided the land for the young farmers.

The management of Dangote Rice led by the Group Executive Director, Devakumar Edwin flagged off the project while taking delivery of some rice paddy bags produced from the pilot project.

## A new dimension to efforts to ensure food security, employment

Edwin explained that the project is a new dimension to the efforts by the pan-African conglomerate, the Dangote Group, to ensure food security and create job opportunities in Nigeria, especially for the youth. This initiative is in line with the vision and commitment of Dangote Industries Limited to create a new generation of agripreneurs that will revolutionise the Nigerian agricultural sector.

“We believe skill, knowledge, enabling environment, collaboration and linkages along the value chain are driving forces for economic empowerment and social development in line with the Federal Government policies. This project will address the skills gap in local rice production among unemployed youths by providing technical, organisational and financial requirements.”

He said it would also enhance domestic rice production to cover the large gap between demand and domestic production and to increase the self-sufficiency of Nigeria and substitute imported rice by quality Nigerian rice brands.

Edwin disclosed that most modern rice mills in Nigeria presently operate at not more than 20% capacity utilisation due mainly to lack of good quality paddy and that Dangote Rice aimed to change this situation by developing and adapting out-grower schemes. According to him, the Dangote Rice Company plans to set up a 150,000 metric tonnes integrated rice mill and sell one million mt of parboiled rice by 2018.

The Dangote Group boss stated that the decision of the management to start the project was driven by two factors, one of which is the need for youth employment through empowerment to go into agriculture. “The youths are more vulnerable to crimes and other social vices when they have nothing to engage them and this, in turn, affect the nation negatively. “The second factor is the need to strengthen the on-going efforts at producing rice for self-sufficiency so that we can save foreign exchange. By the time we will be doing one million metric tonnes of rice next year, no less than three million jobs would have been created along the value chain.”

Edwin said the Kogi pilot project will cover four seasons of two years and will be launched in four other states soon.

## **A practical step towards nation building**

In his own remark, the Managing Director of Dangote Rice, Robert Coleman urged the youth farmers to concentrate on the project and pay attention to details so that they would come out with good paddy yield.

He congratulated the farmers for the decision to partner with Dangote Rice noting that they have a solid source of livelihood for themselves and members of their families if they give their all for the success of the scheme.

The Coordinator of the youth farmers, Umar Etudaye thanked the management of Dangote Rice for believing in them and engaging them for the project. He promised that they would deliver on the mandate given to them on the project.

He stated that the scheme is a practical step towards nation building because it's the youths, who constitute 40 percent of the population, that would build the nation and only youths that are empowered and gainfully employed can do that.