

AgriHero Challenges 2026 Launches to Back Africa's Next Wave of Agricultural Innovation

Johannesburg, South Africa

The AgriHero Challenges 2026 has officially launched, bringing together stakeholders from Africa and Asia to support the next generation of agricultural innovation and entrepreneurship across the continent.

Conceived and implemented by Zen Consortium under the broader Africa–Asia Platform framework, backed by the African Development Bank Group (AfDB), the Africa Asia Forum, and academic collaborators of University of Pretoria, University of Tokyo and University of Cape Town, The programme aims to identify and scale high-impact solutions across the full agricultural value chain — spanning AI-driven farming, climate-smart agriculture, food science, circular economy models, sustainable packaging, and smart farming technologies.

AgriHero Challenges 2026 represents the realisation of a long-held conviction: that Africa's agricultural future must be driven by African innovators, and that the infrastructure to support them must be as ambitious as the challenges they are trying to solve.

According to **Jovi Chen, CEO of Zen Consortium**, the initiative was born out of a growing need for deeper cooperation between the two regions.



“For a long time, Africa and Asia have been developing in parallel, but there is still enormous, untapped opportunity between the two continents,” said Chen. “Africa has the talent, resources, and entrepreneurial drive, while Asia has built strong ecosystems around technology, manufacturing, and scale. The future will depend on how well these strengths can work together.”

Chen added that AgriHero was designed to move beyond the traditional startup competition model by creating practical pathways for innovators to access mentorship, partnerships, and international exposure.

Dr Keiko Takei, Chief Education Analyst at the African Development Bank Group and Task Manager of the A–A Platform, emphasised that:

“The AgriHero Challenges advances the Bank’s Four Cardinal Points, with a strong focus on industrialisation by harnessing Africa’s demographic transformation—turning population growth into skills, jobs, and thriving agri-industries. It strengthens food security, drives energy demand, and connects Africa to Asian markets, helping bridge the two regions through innovation and partnership.

By linking African innovators with Asian technologies, expertise, and investment, the initiative creates practical pathways for scaling solutions across borders.

It also supports youth and women entrepreneurs to participate more actively in emerging agri-value chains, ensuring that growth is both inclusive and sustainable.”



Professor Wanda Markotter, Interim Director of Future Africa at the University of Pretoria, noted:



"Addressing Africa's most urgent challenges, including food security and agricultural sustainability, demands transdisciplinary collaboration supported by equitable global partnerships. That is precisely what Future Africa at the University of Pretoria was built to enable, and it is why we are honoured to be part of this initiative where we serves as the implementing agency for the Africa–Asia Platform project, leading on-the-ground operationalisation alongside the University of Tokyo and

the University of Cape Town."

Applications officially opened this week and will remain open until 30 June 2026.

Programme milestones include:

- ***30 June 2026 — Applications Close***
- ***07 July 2026 — Top 10 Finalists Announced***
- ***15 July 2026 — Virtual Pitch Battle***
- ***31 July 2026 — Top 5 Startups Begin Mentorship Programme***
- ***11 August 2026 — Grand Finale in Gauteng , South Africa / Virtual***

Selected finalists will receive cash rewards, strategic business support, professional mentorship, and access to networks designed to help startups scale sustainably.

In addition, winning startups will have opportunities to explore expansion into Asian markets through the programme's growing Africa–Asia partnership network, creating potential pathways for collaboration, distribution, and international growth.

Organisers believe the initiative comes at an important time as global conversations around food security, sustainability, and agricultural resilience continue to intensify.

Applications can be submitted via email to agrihero@zenconsortium.com.

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