

Elevator Pitch Contest by *Sight and Life*

Accra, Ghana, 10–12 September 2019

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Sight and Life, Basel, Switzerland

How can we nourish 9 billion people by 2050? With government programs underfunded, aid initiatives having limited reach and private-sector action leaving much to be desired, we need disruptive solutions to solve humanity's pressing issues. So, we pose these challenges to young innovators of the world through the Elevator Pitch Contest (EPC) by *Sight and Life*.

**“We need disruptive solutions
to solve humanity's
pressing issues”**

Entrepreneurial life is tough. Investment funds are available, but the competition is harsh. Young students need to effectively articulate their idea in a manner that is persuasive and precise. The term ‘elevator pitch’ describes an imagined scenario in which an entrepreneur accidentally meets a potential investor in an elevator and has an opportunity to quickly ‘pitch’ his or her business concept. As Kalpana Beesabathuni of *Sight and Life* explains: “We designed the contest in such a way that it provides the tools for young scientists and engineers to communicate their unique ideas in a persuasive manner – in the time it takes to ride an elevator.”

Aspirational and affordable nutritious foods

Micronutrient malnutrition is highly prevalent and persistent among women in Ghana, where half of the women of reproductive age are folate-deficient, 40 percent are overweight and 20 percent are anemic. The country is experiencing a critical need for foods that are rich in micronutrients. The latest EPC by *Sight and Life* – held in partnership with OBAASIMA, McGill University and the Association of Ghana Industries – therefore sought disruptive ideas on the subject of aspirational and affordable nutritious foods.

The contest

This was *Sight and Life's* first EPC designed specifically to encourage local solutions to local problems by locals. Open only to residents of Ghana, the contest drew 35 entries, submitted by students from six Ghanaian universities and by many young entrepreneurs. Applications ranged from innovative ideas to successful solutions that are already operating at scale, presenting the judges with no simple task as they sought to narrow down the 35 applicants to seven finalists. Our thanks go to the jury members, who shared their immense knowledge, experience and expertise in nutrition assessment:

> **Breda Gavin-Smith**, Global Public Health
Nutrition Manager, *Sight and Life*

> **Kwame Jantuah**, CEO, African Energy Consortium Ltd

> **Samuel Kwame Ntim Adu**, Founder and CEO,
Yedent Agro Group of Companies Ltd

“To see so many young, enthusiastic, ambassadors for nutrition was truly inspiring. So much passion, commitment and tenacity is required to get a nutritious product off the ground, and each of the finalists had these qualities. I have no doubt their innovations will be successful with appropriate support and mentoring, which are vital tools for young entrepreneurs.”

Breda Gavin-Smith, Elevator Pitch Contest judge



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Breda Gavin-Smith asks a finalist a question during the Q&A session in Accra, Ghana

The seven finalists were awarded a round trip to Accra, Ghana, to pitch their innovations at the Ghana Industrial Summit & Exhibition 2019. Before the competition, each finalist received extensive mentorship and feedback regarding their concept and presentation to help hone their pitch. The finalists worked with Parand Salmassinia, Global Vice President of Commercial Strategy and Key Accounts for DSM's Personal Care & Aroma Ingredients business, and Dr Nii Addy, Assistant Professor (Research) at McGill University's Institute for the Study of International Development, on their innovations, refining their pitches and improving their narratives during multiple group and individual sessions.

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“I greatly enjoyed serving as a mentor to the contestants. Their passion and dedication for their ventures was inspiring. One could see how much effort they had put into the overall work, including the pitches.”

Nii Addy, Elevator Pitch Contest mentor

The finalists also met with William Offori Appaw, a previous EPC finalist, who shared his entrepreneurial journey and the experience of participating in the 2018 EPC in Mumbai.

The winners

The third-place winner of the EPC was Ewura-Esi Manful from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, with ‘Sweetpot Yogurt’ – a nutritious yogurt that aims to curb vitamin A deficiency while simultaneously providing a market for sweet potatoes. Sweetpot Yoghurt is naturally flavored and supplemented with vitamin A and dietary fibers, presenting consumers with a healthier snack choice.

The second-place winner was Grace A Twumasi, also from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. She pitched an innovative, nutrient-dense food for children made completely from locally available raw materials such as orange-flesh sweet potato, millet and soya beans. Grace's innovation has already completed research trials at the Manhiya Children's Hospital in Kumasi, and is ready to be scaled up to the market.

The winner of the competition was Zeenatu Suglo Adams from Pneuma Food Scientifics, a startup that formulates affordable and nutritious snacks that taste great. Zeenatu pitched ‘Yammy Pops,’ a ready-to-eat extruded snack made from underutilized and highly nutritious crops (yam, tamarind and baobab). This snack is rich in vitamin C, dietary minerals, protein and fiber.



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Grace A Twumasi receives the first runner-up award from Ing. Alfred D Sackeyfio, Director of Corporate Strategy, Volta River Authority



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Front row, sixth from left: Joachim Asare (SPeCS Foods), with (left to right) Zeenatu Suglo Adams (Pneuma Food Scientifics), Grace A Twumasi (Sweepolac), Edith Kufoalor (Sosogin Tea), Seth Twum-Akwaboah (Association of Ghana Industries CEO), Ewura-Esi Manful (Sweetpot Yoghurt), John Attu (Nature Foods), Deborah Amoasi (Dietician App), along with other team members

Yammy Pops are similar to corn pops but because they are made from yams they will help to reduce dietary dependence on cereals and grains.

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“Initially it was not an easy task, but after many rehearsals and coaching by the EPC team, I managed to talk about my idea in five minutes. This activity helped me identify the key features needed for building a business. Passion alone is not enough. The facts and figures are very important.”

*Zeenatu Suglo Adams,
Elevator Pitch Contest winner*

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The other EPC finalists were:

Joachim Asare, SPeCS Foods

Muden is a nutritious, fermented cake made from cereals that are popular in Ghana, such as maize, millet, rice, soybean and sorghum. It can either be eaten on its own or added to cooked foods. The fermentation process enhances the development of micronutrients.

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Edith Kufoalor, Sosogin

Sosogin is an organic herbal tea made from locally grown hibiscus petals, bicolor sorghum grass, lemongrass and ginger. It contains nutrients that help digestion and prevent stomach ulcers, and it also contains anti-biofilm agents such as beta-carotene and lycopene.

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John Attu, Nature Foods

John Attu's submission was a yogurt made from fresh pasteurized cow's milk and locally sourced fruits. The product is rich in protein, calcium, vitamin D, vitamin B₁₂, riboflavin, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium and probiotics, which boost digestive health. The addition of fresh fruits improves the vitamin, mineral and fiber content of the product.

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Deborah Amoasi, Dietician App

The Dietician App is a mobile app with a database that lists the calorific content of all Ghanaian foods. The aim of the app is to be able to convert foods consumed into daily calories and

provide individual body mass index scores depending on height and weight. The EPC by *Sight and Life* brought together local entrepreneurs and provided an opportunity for them to connect and incubate their ideas. The seven finalists filled this contest with their cutting-edge ideas and passion. We are looking forward to bright futures for all of them.

This was *Sight and Life's* fourth EPC, the first three having been held in Cancun (2016, focusing on micronutrients), Boston (2018, seeking innovations in nutrition assessment) and Mumbai (2018, searching for ways to reduce aflatoxins). The next EPC will be held in Bangkok on 24 March 2020, and will focus on climate-smart nutrition. For more information on these exciting competitions, visit www.elevator-pitch-contest.org.

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