

## PRESS RELEASE

Promote appropriate agricultural technologies and innovations  
for agri-business resilience amid COVID 19 pandemic  
*AATF is transforming livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa through innovative  
agricultural technologies.*



**Nairobi, July 27 2020:** African governments, seed companies and regional bodies have been asked to promote appropriate agricultural technologies and innovations that will help cushion smallholder farmers and agri-businesses against the negative effects of COVID 19 pandemic on agricultural production and markets.

The call was made by experts speaking during a webinar hosted by the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) on 27 July 2020, themed, "*Promotion of technologies and innovations for agri-business resilience in Africa in the wake of COVID-19.*"

The webinar, graced by a panel of renowned agricultural experts, recommended that African governments create an enabling policy environment for commercialization, support smart agro-input subsidy programmes without distorting market dynamics and promote digital agriculture solutions.

The moderator of the session, Dr. Denis Kyetere, Executive Director of AATF, noted that agri-businesses in Africa remain vulnerable to threats such as climatic change, rapid population growth, pests and diseases among others and that the emergence of COVID-19 complicates matters further threatening farmers' livelihoods.

"For the last 15 years, AATF has dedicated itself to empowering smallholder farmers in Africa, with a wide choice of agricultural innovations and strategies to support their transition from subsistence to Agribusiness," said Dr. Kyetere, adding that while these efforts are improving the productivity of farmers, emerging challenges are complicating progress.

Prof. Hamadi Boga, the Principal Secretary, State Department for Agricultural Research in the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries Kenya noted that the government developed measures and strategies to ensure food was available, accessible and affordable to the general population when the first case of COVID-19 was reported in March 2020.

To further cushion citizens from the impact of the pandemic, Prof. Boga said the government ensured food production, processing and marketing were maintained to protect citizens from exposure to hunger. "We developed protocols for agricultural value chains to continue with business to avoid food crisis," said Prof. Boga.

The Director of Agriculture and Agro-Industry at the African Development Bank, Dr. Martin Fregene, noted that the Bank has unveiled a roadmap to assist African countries in tackling the food and nutrition security threat foisted by the COVID-19 crisis through a number of immediate and longer-term interventions under the Feed Africa Initiative.

"Ensuring food security for Africans in all situations is at the core of the Bank's Feed Africa Strategy. Our institution will coordinate its efforts with different stakeholders across the continent to effectively answer the needs of regional member countries," said Dr. Fregene, adding that the Bank is working with African governments to offer support to vulnerable communities during the pandemic.

The Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT) Maize Compact Project that aims at increasing uptake and use of proven high-yielding climate smart maize technologies by smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa, is one of the Bank's initiatives being implemented by AATF.

Dr. Emmanuel Okogbenin, the Director of Programme Development and Commercialisation at AATF, noted that agri-businesses in Africa face unique challenges including high post-harvest losses, poor infrastructure and limited access to agricultural finance and insurance.

“Agribusinesses in Africa are vulnerable to varied shocks and this has been further compounded by other challenges brought about by restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic including limited access to inputs, disrupted food production, shortage of labour and closed borders,” said Dr. Okogbenin.

Dr. Okogbenin said that agri-business should be viewed as an economic pathway for Africa where agriculture contributes substantially and significantly among other sectors to the total Gross Domestic Product in most countries in the continent, adding that ‘there is need to create an environment that will enable investment and adoption of best practices that are profitable in agribusiness and to rapidly modernize farming to integrate commercially successful innovative technologies for agribusiness resilience in the wake of COVID-19.’

Prof. Ruth Oniango, Founder of Rural Outreach and winner of Africa Food Prize 2017 said food systems in the continent will emerge stronger post-COVID-19 subject to the adoption of sound policies and innovations. Prof. Oniango noted that just like the creativity that has been witnessed in the healthcare sector during this COVID-19 period, agriculture is likewise undergoing a revolution with the help of younger and innovative farmers. "COVID-19 pandemic has left a mark on all sectors including agriculture, which is the mainstay and backbone of the African economy," said Prof. Oniango.

Mr. Justin Rakotoarisaona, Secretary General of the African Seed Trade Association noted that restriction in movement of human and seed, reduction in labour availability and increase in cost for seed production are some of the challenges brought about by COVID-19 in the seed sector.

Mr. Stephen Muchiri, the Chief Executive Officer of East Africa Farmers Federation pointed out that COVID-19 pandemic has caused a lot of disruption in production at the farmers' level. He noted that they are working closely with farmers to help them cope with the crisis by utilizing e-platforms such as the e-granary where they link farmers to access agricultural inputs.

#####

### **About AATF ([www.aatf-africa.org](http://www.aatf-africa.org))**

Founded in 2003 to address Africa's food security prospects through agricultural technology, AATF believes that the agricultural sector is a key foundational pillar as Africa consolidates its economic growth and carves out its new position as a major global economic powerhouse and the next growth market in the world. It was formed in response to the need for an effective mechanism that would facilitate and support negotiation for technology access and delivery and formation of appropriate partnerships to manage the development & deployment of innovative technologies for use by smallholder farmers in SSA:

### **About the African Development Bank Group:**

The African Development Bank (AfDB) Group is the premier development finance institution in Africa with a mandate to spur sustainable economic development and social progress in the continent, thereby contributing to poverty reduction. The Bank Group achieves this objective by mobilizing and allocating resources for investment in the continent; and providing policy advice and technical assistance to support development efforts. The African Development Bank's authorized capital of around USD 208 billion is subscribed to by 81 member countries made up of 54 African countries and 26 non-African countries. For more information, visit [www.afdb.org](http://www.afdb.org)

### **For more information contact:**

Nancy Muchiri, Communications and Partnerships Unit, AATF; [n.muchiri@aatf-africa.org](mailto:n.muchiri@aatf-africa.org) +254 20 4223700

1. The recording for the webinar is [here](#)