

# Investing in new farming technologies key in transforming African agriculture

By George Achia



Transforming African agriculture into an engine of economic growth that will have benefits far beyond the farm sector lies in investing in and making accessible new farming technologies for Africa – from better seeds to machinery to digital tools, says Dr. Denis Kyetere, the Executive Director, AATF.

The remarks were made by Dr. Kyetere in a panel session focusing on *Accelerating the growth, sustainability, and inclusivity of digital agricultural solutions* during the 10<sup>th</sup> African Green Revolution Forum (AGRF) virtual Summit 2020, held between 8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and hosted by the Government of Rwanda.

The other speakers in the session included Mr. Joseph Mucheru, Kenya's Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Information and Communications and Mr. Liam Condon, President, Bayer Crop Science.

The panel session explored ways towards increasing the overall sustainability of digital solutions for African agriculture.

Dr. Kyetere noted that as African farmers are beginning to innovate, increase productivity and drive progress across economies, other challenges including drought & climate change, pest and diseases, low access to technologies, market failure and inefficient value chains and adulterated agro-inputs threaten gains already made by the farmers.

“These farmers can use technology to reduce crop losses, control pests and diseases and better farm management to increase their wealth and health,” he said, adding that there is growing potential of digital agricultural solutions to help address some challenges in the agricultural systems.

“At AATF, we are leveraging on digital solutions to accelerate deployment and commercialization of technologies, mechanisation and seed production through a number of Applications such as Market Information Support System for the Cassava Mechanisation and Agro-processing Project (*MISS CAMAP*) that enhances access to e-extension services and markets by smallholder farmers, *AgriDrive App* that supports access to mechanisation services and *Hello Tractor App* which provides remote tracking of farm assets, preventing fraud and machine misuse,” said Dr. Kyetere.

He pointed out that digital solutions can be deployed to enhance crop management, seed inspection and seed certification processes with capabilities for seed inspection with real-time data generated from the field allowing quick decision making, data management and product traceability throughout the certification process supporting efficient seed dispatch and cross border trade of the seed.

In terms of adoption of digital solutions in agricultural value chains and the potential for growth, Dr. Kyetere noted that digital agriculture innovations can help to increase smallholder yields by up to 70 per cent and incomes by up to 40 per cent.

“The uptake of these solutions is considered a game-changer in the transformation of African agriculture. For example, AATF’s Hello Tractor Application has to date served 22,500 farmers in Nigeria and Kenya and reports a 200 per cent increase in customer yields,” he said.

To accelerate growth of digital agricultural solutions, Dr. Kyetere called for the need for sound national strategies that includes creating an enabling policy and regulatory environment to support adoption of digital solutions – including ensuring affordability of mobile phones and connectivity, especially in the rural areas.

“Agricultural transformation is within our reach. Our farmers can improve their productivity, increase their wealth and health and continue the path of progress if they have access to the right mix of farming innovations including digital agricultural solution

The session panelists called for increased digital penetration in rural areas through the spread of mobile technology to play a transformative role in shifting food systems towards more sustainable and efficient practices.

“Time is ripe for digital solutions to accelerate agriculture development in Africa. As in most other innovations, there is need for an enabling environment to support private sector investment and to allow access to the solutions by those who need them. Therefore, collaborations and partnerships are critical for moving forward these innovations,” emphasized Dr. Kyetere.