

## PRESS RELEASE

### Mechanisation & Digital Agriculture; Nutrition

# Stakeholders push to unlock Africa's agricultural mechanization potential



**[Abuja: October 2, 2020]** Major stakeholders in agricultural mechanization have called for adoption of a value chain approach to mechanization as one of the best options towards attaining high productivity in agriculture on the continent.

Speaking during a webinar organized by AATF, (Monday September 28) the stakeholders that included experts in agricultural mechanization, agribusiness, digital agriculture and representatives of global agencies like the World Bank, African Union, the National Agriculture Research Organization (NARO) of Uganda and private sector players agreed that smallholder farmers are key players in the value-chain system that can engender growth and sustainability of Africa's agricultural productivity.

Setting the stage, Mr. George Marechera, Business Development Manager at AATF, said mechanization provides an opportunity for smallholder farmers to evolve from subsistence to business. He however added that this can only happen where mechanization is adopted along the agricultural value chain.



According to Marechera, mechanization brings about increased production and reduces high labor costs, enhances efficient production at low cost and facilitates competitive pricing, promote efficient use of input and enhance productivity.

“Farmer aggregation, clustering and training on mechanization and farming as a business, identification of local entrepreneurs and training of tractor operators in mechanization service provision including the establishment of Mechanization Model Farms (MMF) to provide technology demonstration and capacity building are critical steps that are needed to ensure mechanization makes an impact on the continent,”

Marechera said. Marechera, who also serves as the Managing Director of the Agridrive Limited, a socio enterprise owned by AATF and specializing in mechanization services provision, equipment support and providing agribusiness solutions to farmers in SSA, noted that mechanization is not a silver bullet to the production challenges facing agriculture but encouraged the introduction of a mechanization system that ensures smallholder farmers get optimal benefits from utilizing mechanization.

Dr Parmesh Shah, Global Lead, Data-driven and Digital Agriculture at the World Bank in his presentation on opportunities and challenges for sustainable financing of agricultural mechanization in Africa, noted that mechanization goes beyond deployment of tractors to farms as it involves production, harvesting, postharvest handling, transportation, storage, and packaging.

Speaking on the spatial variations of mechanization demand across Africa, Shah noted that most African countries are not at par when it comes to the deployment of tractors in agriculture. He therefore called for a critical review of sub-regional patterns in the utilization of mechanization to see what works and what can be borrowed.

Dr. Omongo Christopher Abu, Principal Research Officer with the National Agricultural Organization (NARO)-Uganda who traced the origin of agricultural mechanization in Africa to the early 1950s and acknowledged the low level of mechanization in the agricultural value chain adding that over 90 percent of transactions (farm production-to-market) are handled through inefficient labour intensive tools.

According to Christopher, agricultural mechanization is a catalyst for economic growth and therefore needs to be promoted as a business on the continent. Kalongo Chitengi a Senior Manager with AGCO Future Farm called for a deliberate government policy that favors tax rates and duties to promote mechanization adding that such government-backed agricultural policies have the potential of making farming profitable.

Brett Hudson from KURAI who spoke on enhancing access to agricultural mechanization through digital tools noted that it was important to bridge the knowledge gap in



mechanization by making available crucial information that will help prospective farmers.

Such information, according to him, should include what machinery are needed, where and how they can be found. “This is vital as agricultural machines which are the drivers of mechanization are often unaffordable for smallholder farmers.”

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**About AATF: (<https://www.aatf-africa.org/about-us/>):** AATF is an African-led not-for-profit organization that is working towards agricultural transformation to address food and nutrition security and generate health and wealth for smallholder farmers through access and delivery of innovative and fitting agricultural technologies. AATF believes that farmers in Africa will become globally competitive through use of the best technology, optimal agricultural practices, strategic product value addition and boosted access to efficient markets within and outside Africa.