



Exhibitors attend to visitors on the sidelines of the forum.
Photo Credit: AATF

Agricultural technology forum calls for more investment in innovation

By Verenardo Meeme

AFRICAN governments, regional economic communities, and continental bodies have been urged to fast-track agricultural technology deployment while integrating science, technology and innovations (STI) in their respective development frameworks to improve farm productivity on the continent.

Speakers at the inaugural African Conference on Agricultural Technologies (ACAT) 2023 held between October 30 and November 3 in Nairobi also called on Africa Union (AU) member states and regional economic communities to nurture political will to drive technological advancement in the agricultural sector towards food self-sufficiency.

The meeting brought together over 500 participants, including government representatives, industry thought leaders, policymakers, technical experts, private institutions, farmers, women and youth, to share ideas on how to move forward the African agriculture.

“Africa is a continent of immense potential. We know that on average, up to 35 percent of the continent’s gross domestic product is derived from agriculture. Agriculture as a sector also accounts for the livelihood of more than 50 percent of the continent’s population,” said Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, former president of Nigeria.

The five-day conference featured panel discussions and a series of technical interactive sessions.

Cutting-edge innovations and emerging trends that are revolutionising agricultural production across the continent were showcased at the event.

“Investment in innovation in African agriculture must encompass several essential dimensions which include access to finance, investment in research, capacity building, and monitoring and evaluation,” said Dr Jonathan, who is also the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF)’s goodwill ambassador in Africa.

Africa’s investment in research and development (R&D) as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) stands at 0.5 percent, way below the world average of 1.8 percent and which consequently translates into slow pace of research in critical sectors such as agriculture.

“Facilitating the Establishment of Regional Centers of Leadership (RCoLs) in the SADC Region”



Exhibitors during the conference. Photo Credit: Verenardo Meeme.

Kenya’s Cabinet Secretary for Agriculture and Livestock Development, Mithika Linturi, said the government was encouraging use of modern farming technologies to upscale productivity and farmers’ earnings in line with its Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda.

“The government of Kenya has prioritised agriculture as a key driver for economic transformation and is providing increased investments in the sector. It is committed to support and encourage use of modern farming technologies to upscale productivity and farmers’ earnings in line with the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda. The 10-year Agricultural Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy supports innovative technology to achieve inclusive agricultural growth, food and nutrition security in the country,” said Mr. Linturi said.

AATF, which organised the forum, underscored the role of partnerships among institutions in unlocking the potential in science, technology, and innovation.

“The importance of creating a functional enabling environment and sufficient incentives to facilitate research, development and commercialisation of agricultural innovations and establishment of a functional private sector can’t be overemphasised,” noted Dr. Canisius Kanangire, the Executive Director of AATF.

Dr. Kanangire said there was a need to build farmer resilience in Africa, considering that agricultural production and food systems on the continent are highly vulnerable to climate change.

His sentiments were echoed by Prof. Aggrey Ambali, the AATF Board of Trustees Chairperson, saying: “It was clear to me as I listened to the various conversations, that we cannot escape investing time and energy in stronger partnerships to make some of our aspirations come true.”

Dr. Kanangire also expressed concern about the impact of Africa’s aging farming population on productivity and technology adoption, saying that the continent’s youth bulge can be a game-changer in the sector.

With over 80 percent of innovators and early adoptors being young people, governments and stakeholders were challenged to relook the place of the youth.

“Despite the positive effect of agriculture across the continent, the sector remains unattractive to young people,” said Dr. Kanangire. “Many young Africans move to the urban areas and have no interest in taking up agriculture as a source of livelihood and not yet willing to soil their hands. The rural population comprising mostly smallholder farmers practices subsistence farming. Many of these farmers are faced with the problem of low productivity caused by a combination of adverse climatic conditions and harmful farm practices.”

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