High Level Panel

Use of Digital Solutions in Agriculture

The African Union – European Union Agriculture Ministers Conference
21 June 2019, FAO HQ, Rome, Italy

Context

There is increasing global recognition that digitalisation is a game changer in transforming smallholder agriculture. In 2019 both the EU-African Union Task Force Rural Africa Report (TFRA) and the Communiqué from the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture held in Berlin in January highlighted the power of digitalisation[1] to increase productivity, profitability and sustainability among smallholder farmers that produce the bulk of Africa's agricultural output. An inclusive, digitally enabled agricultural transformation could help achieve meaningful livelihood improvements for Africa's smallholder farmers and pastoralists. It could drive greater engagement in agriculture from women and youth and support employment opportunities along the value chain. Furthermore, it could help build resilience to climate change. While it may not be a cure-all, it's clear that Digitalisation for Agriculture (D4Ag) potential to contribute to Africa's food security, nutrition and inclusive growth is significant.

With digitally enabled advisory services, financial access and market linkages farmers can more easily purchase inputs, achieve higher yields, earn greater income and build climate resilience. This increased stability for farmers can lead to better livelihoods and access to information will also assist more informed decision making. Technology such as drones, the internet of things and blockchain can enable more traceability and, in turn, certification and better access to global and regional markets. And at the macro level, national and regional datasets can lead to better informed policy.

To bring about developmental change and drive digitally-enabled agricultural transformation in Africa, a number of challenges need to be addressed, including greater rural connectivity, robust data infrastructure (weather, soil, agronomic, etc.), enabling policy and regulatory framework, and digital skills development at all levels.

Many African countries now have e-agriculture strategies in place and there are pledges to open up more government data on agriculture. However, the degree to which these are being implemented is not clear and there is a need to track this. A number of African countries have also passed legislation on data privacy, and other countries are considering draft bills. Legislation on data sharing and data sharing

codes of conduct have been introduced to support digitalisation of agriculture in Europe and may offer useful models for Africa.

Understanding the current state and the transformative potential of digitalisation in sustainable agriculture in Africa will provide valuable insights to governments, private sector, development partners and agricultural professionals.

Objectives and outcome

The thematic session will present an overview of the state of digitalisation in agriculture in Africa, highlight challenges and opportunities, and draw implications for the enabling policy and investment environment.
The session will help to identify the areas in which further investment in digitalisation can accelerate progress towards **increasing smallholder productivity, profitability and resilience** and create greater opportunities for youth and women. It will articulate the promise of digitalisation and detail enablers and barriers to growth, and the likely evolution of digital applications in the sector.
A number of recommendations are expected to emerge from this session that could help in scaling-up digitalisation to achieve its full potential in helping transform African agriculture in line with the CAADP Agenda and the Malabo Declaration. In particular, specific recommendations for AU-EU collaboration to move this agenda forward will be considered.