

My second session was on the topic: Harnessing the digital and demographic dividends in agri-food systems for rural youth employment and entrepreneurship.

All speakers (USAID, FAO, Yara, MCF etc) agreed that Africa has the largest population of young people whose population growth outweighs other continents. Indeed, this revelation calls for rapid intervention to increase agricultural output and also reduce unemployment among the youth. From the discussions, I realised the enormous opportunities inherent in the agricultural value chain may offer a great platform to absorb many youths and also reduce poverty within the sub-region. To achieve this, the representatives of various agencies cited the many youth mentorships and hands-on practical training and internship offered to young people across Africa. Some of this included seed money to tech setups and funding for poultry setups. Of course, these were done to reduce the barriers of entry in the agricultural sector and also change the narrative of seeing agriculture as an attractive business venture. One thing that got my attention was a question posed by delegate who was clad in a fine suit and tie; he asked if other delegates could guess his profession. Though we were in an agricultural forum, none was able to correctly identify his profession. To my surprise, he was a maize farmer from Kenya. While on these feet, this delegate recounted his efforts in using platforms like this break commonly held belief of seeing agriculture as tedious, dirty or unattracted. While puzzled, I also felt challenged to upscale my advocacy efforts to get more young people engaged in the agricultural sector. My only reservation was the low representation of the youth at this conference. In the future, I hope to see more young people attend such an important conference especially when issues concerning young people were being discussed. The keynote speaker at this session was Mr Reeta Roys, President and CEO, MasterCard Foundation.