

Youthful CAS Nyaga loops youth into farming through ICT

By Verenardo Meeme

The social media and mobile telephony are today the technology of choice attracting the youth to adopt solutions and services required to modernize and commercialize agriculture in Africa.

Videos, infographics, photo stories loaded with messages in smartphones have become invaluable tools for sharing agricultural information with key stakeholders including farmers, food-based organizations, extension service providers, marketers, the media and policymakers.

Smallholder farmers, who constitute the majority of agricultural producers on the continent have largely remain poor. According to the African Development Bank (AfDB), 73% of the people living in rural areas subsisting on less than a dollar a day.

The ageing farming population means a new generation of farmers must quickly fill the void and stem the decline in African by integrating the youth into agricultural systems through technology.

Kenya's Chief Administrative Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Cooperatives Anne Nyaga believes that by bridging the digital divide, policymakers can strategically apply ICTs to guide the youth to drive the much-needed agricultural transformation in Africa.

"The modernization and commercialization of agriculture rely heavily on the use of technologies and innovations that are presented in the ICTs," says Nyaga, adding that, "the youth are advancing the use of ICTs in agriculture so they need to be mentored into developing and using the innovations at their disposal."

She says increased education of the youth to adopt innovations presented by ICTs and digital platforms will go a long way in attracting them to embrace a keen interest in the agriculture sector and subsequently contribute towards making Kenya a food secure nation.

Since most youths are educated and are techno-savvy, ICTs is a good entry point to engaging them in agriculture, Nyaga notes citing efforts the government has made to attract the youth to farming activities such as the National Value

Chain Support Programme and the Kenya Cereal Enhancement Programme-Climate Resilient Agricultural Livelihoods Window (KCEP-CRAL).

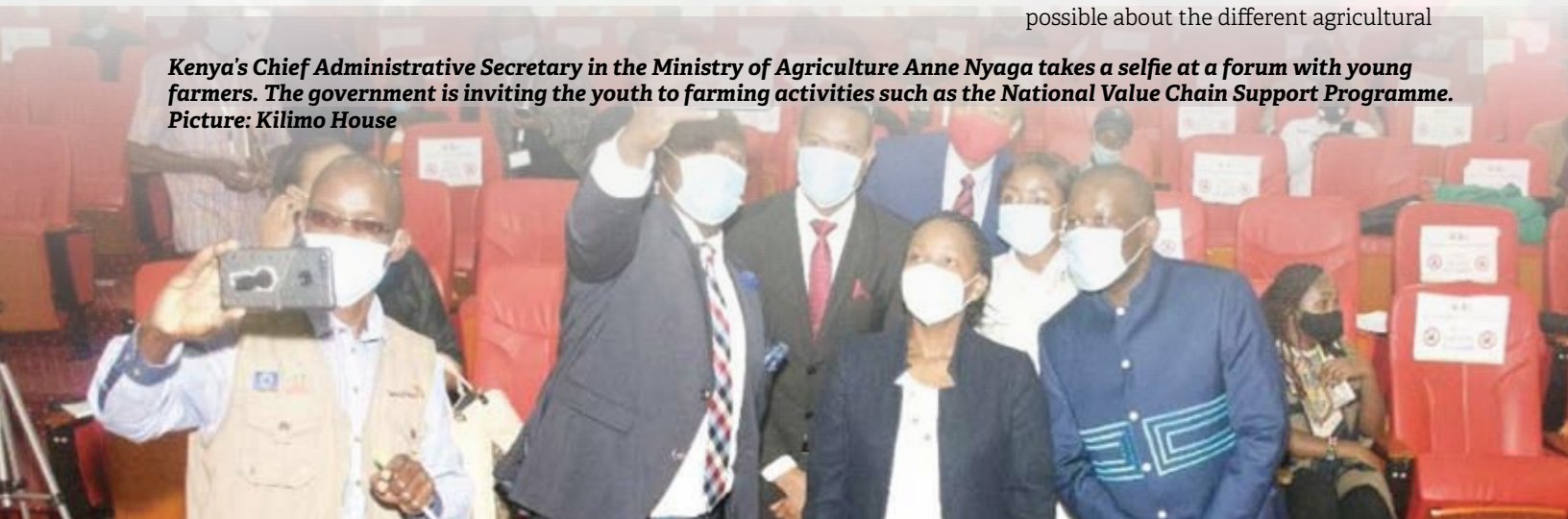
These projects are designed to leverage on ICTs in the distribution of subsidized inputs and to provide other support services through an inclusive value chain approach. The ministry is reaching out to producers, mainly farmers in the rural areas, as it aims to fulfil its mandate of enhancing food security and nutrition.

Through these interventions, the producers are incorporated in the digital environment from registration and enrollment, the redemption of input vouchers, provision of extension services as well as systematic monitoring and evaluation.

One of the major limitations hindering the youth from engaging more actively in farming is lack of access to information on government opportunities available in the agricultural sector, Nyaga says.

"When I got to the office of the Chief Administrative Secretary, my first objective was to ensure that I disseminate as much information as possible about the different agricultural

Kenya's Chief Administrative Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture Anne Nyaga takes a selfie at a forum with young farmers. The government is inviting the youth to farming activities such as the National Value Chain Support Programme. Picture: Kilimo House



programmes that could benefit the youth. To achieve this, I used my digital social media platforms to describe all the agricultural projects and encouraged the youth to seek these opportunities in their counties.”

While the ministry through the national government has the mandate of guiding overall policy and legislative frameworks in the sector, county governments are expected to ensure their implementation, since agriculture is a devolved function in the two-tier system of governance.

To steer the new policy of effectively disseminating information to reach the youth, Nyaga started a unique path of using ICTs to crystalize various agricultural policies into simple practical solutions. “I aspire for a transformation that will successfully position agriculture as a sector of first choice for young Kenyans.”

“I document different how-to technologies at the Kilimo Garden hub located at the ministry headquarter and disseminate it to the public, especially the youth. I have also used social media to reach out to the public to demonstrate how the kitchen garden works,” Nyaga tells *PanAfrican Agriculture*.

She has a simple reason for the method she has adopted. It is a cheaper (cost-effective) means of reaching a wider audience due to the fact that the majority of the intended audience are in one or more social media platforms and one does not need papers or a classroom to reach them.

“Many youth are increasingly becoming interested to engage in agriculture to address the challenge of unemployment. Since they are techsavvy, they can use simple gargets like mobile phones to easily access the information, and it is also time saving (real-time),” she says.

Nyaga concurs that lack of internet in the rural areas impedes some producers/marketers from accessing information, engaging in online marketing or interacting with other producers/marketers on social media platforms using ICT technologies.



Chief Administrative Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture Anne Nyaga believes ICTs can be applied to guide the youth to drive agricultural transformation in Africa. Picture: KilimoHouse

However, various development partners are strengthening the need to build a competitive ICT industry to promote innovation, job creation and the export potential of African companies that would help bring the youth into the agricultural development fold.

One project that addresses this issue is the eTransform Africa reports platform initiated by the World Bank and the African Development Bank, with the support of the African Union, which identifies best practice in the use of ICTs in key sectors of African economies.

Under the theme ‘Transformation-Ready’, the platform explores the growing contribution of ICTs to agriculture, climate change adaptation, education, financial services, government services and health.

Considering that the youth are digitally perceptive, Nyaga uses her social media platforms as a site for careful dissemination of information and realtime interaction with the potential young farmers.

“Through my interaction with the youth on my personal social media handles, I get feedback that informs about the gaps and possibilities for improvement in the design of different interventions for the youth.

“During this COVID-19 pandemic, digital platforms have played a key role, especially in allowing for virtual meetings. I have relied heavily on virtual meetings with our partners and different stakeholders to continue establishing collaborations and efficiencies as an important part of my work,” Nyaga says.