

Statement delivered
by
Mr Hani Eskandar, Digital Service Senior Coordinator on behalf of
The Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union
on the occasion of the
42nd Session of the FAO Conference (14-18 June 2021)
16 June 2021

Thank you Ms Chairperson and good morning everyone.

I have the honour to deliver the following statement on behalf of the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Mr Houlin Zhao, who sends his regrets for not being able to join this Conference today as ITU's annual meeting of its Council Members is underway this week.

Mr Director General,
Ministers and Delegates,
Colleagues,

Agriculture has been a driver of progress throughout history. Today, it is facing a central challenge: how to ensure equitable access to food and livelihoods while preserving the environment and achieving sustainability.

Digital technologies can help address this challenge and ITU, as the UN specialised agency for information and communication technologies (ICTs), is committed to fostering and accelerating digital agricultural innovation.'

Together with FAO, ITU has helped governments develop and adapt strategies for digital agriculture, capacity building, knowledge dissemination and sharing of successful solutions and collaboration models.

We have been working on the ground in several countries to bring relevant digital solutions to communities in need, showing how ICTs can improve agricultural practices and raise living standards of smallholder farmers.

ITU's Smart Villages project in Niger is a good example of this, providing farmers with relevant market information and practical livestock management guidance, not to mention supporting remote education, healthcare and a wide range of other services related to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The question is whether farmers everywhere can benefit from ICTs, especially when many countries and regions of the world are home to millions of small-scale producers for whom even basic ICT services are still out of reach or too expensive.

ITU welcomes FAO's commitment to convert 1,000 villages across the world into digital village hubs, and we look forward to continued collaboration with FAO to contribute to agricultural development by addressing the rural-urban digital divide.

For this, we need to put the right ICT infrastructure and investment environment in place – not only to attract investors to under- and unserved areas, but also to encourage private and public actors to make the best use of limited investment resources.

We also need to innovate and ensure that no one is left behind by providing farmers with the right digital skillset, an area where ITU and FAO are collaborating to bring digital skills training to disadvantaged communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These ‘4 I’s’ – Infrastructure, Investment, Innovation and Inclusiveness – can help support FAO’s new vision to optimize four betters: better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life.

Now is the time to accelerate the digital transformation of the agricultural sector and help end hunger.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated global hunger and malnourishment, caused loss of jobs and disrupted supply chains and markets.

With less than ten years left to achieve the SDGs, we all need to work together to give our farmers the tools and skills they need to turn the digital agricultural transformation into a development transformation for all.

Thank you for your attention.