

Climate-Resilient Food Systems Event: COP27

Thank you, Dr Delice

Friends, Colleagues and Partners from the Commonwealth and beyond

Thank you for inviting me to open this important event, in the midst of this vital summit, on behalf of the Commonwealth.

It is a pleasure to be here in the Sustainable Agriculture for the Americas Pavilion, although I am sure you will understand that as Secretary-General I will touch on all the regions of the Commonwealth in my remarks.

Let me begin with our context.

Food security is both a serious long-term challenge, and an acute crisis.

And it is deeply complex.

There is enough food in the world for everyone. Yet we all know that, right now, food insecurity is increasing.

There is no one single driver - there are overlapping, interlinked challenge which manifest in both cause, and effect.

We are emerging from a terrible pandemic which, beyond the huge and tragic cost in human life, has disrupted trade and economic activity.

Recoveries are stalling and debt is rising.

We are faced with both the existential threat of climate change, and with the amplification of existing social, political and economic inequalities which climate change brings.

Harvests are poor and unpredictable.

Droughts are worsening.

Land is more acidic and harder to cultivate.

In too many parts of our world, those who produce food are struggling to feed themselves.

So food insecurity is a consequence of man-made climate change, but it is also a cause.

Because agriculture and its associated practices uses half of the world's vegetated land.

It represents a quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions.

And it drives 31% of biodiversity loss.

And now, against this backdrop, the impact of conflict and instability in our world is throttling the supply of grain and spiking prices - compounding economic and environmental pressures to bring us to the point of emergency.

From the Central American Dry Corridor, through the Sahel to the Horn of Africa, and Eastwards to Asia, the World Food Programme describes a *ring of fire* stretching around the world: where conflict and climate shocks are driving millions of people to the very edge.

Many Commonwealth countries form part of this ring of fire.

We have 33 Small States, 25 of which are Small Island Developing States, and 12 of the world's Least Developed Countries.

They are particularly exposed, and our responsibility to them is profound.

The agricultural sector is vital to the economies of most Commonwealth member states.

Globally, 500 million households globally depend on agriculture for their livelihoods.

In Commonwealth Africa and Commonwealth Pacific, the agricultural sector's contribution to GDP is 17% and 14% respectively.

The sector employs up to 9 percent of the population of the Caribbean Small Island Developing States.

A modern, sustainable agricultural sector is essential for life and livelihoods.

And the transformation of the sector is a policy priority for many Commonwealth Governments - so it is a priority for me as Secretary-General.

So, what is our approach?

The day-to-day, season-to-season, year-to-year impacts of climate change demand an increase in the adaptive capacity of our smallholder farmers.

They need timely access to drought resistance and short-season seed varieties, as well as the expertise to use them.

They need modern tools to reduce the negative impact of agro-chemicals on soils and keep the land alive.

They need access to insurance services to cushion them against flood, drought, pest, and diseases.

They need access to alternative credit-scoring tools that will enable them to bypass the traditional collateral systems for credit.

And policy makers need access to timely macro-intelligence services for national and regional decisions.

Digitalisation is a vital enabler of this adaptive capacity - and through the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda we provide dedicated support to help our member states scale up access to digital solutions for their populations.

Because sustainable and inclusive access to adaptation services is subject to accurate and timely data.

And agricultural data infrastructure is the bedrock for digitalisation and provides the foundation for digital agricultural services

But many of the current models of managing agricultural data are not helping our member states to fully exploit the potential of digitalisation within the sector.

There are hundreds of successful cases of digital innovations operating across the Commonwealth, including digital climate advisory services - but up to

now it has proved difficult to document, share and disrupt.

This is partly because no baseline exists - anywhere.

So we have created one, through the report which I was proud to launch last week and which I am proud to present to you today.

It lays the foundation for understanding the state of digital agriculture in the Commonwealth.

It uses the Secretariat's unique *digital agriculture framework* to analyse three essential pillars: digital innovations; data infrastructure; and business development services, while evaluating the enabling environment for digitalisation.

This is the first time such a framework has been used to assess how digitalisation is impacting the agricultural sector - another Commonwealth first.

As you will see, the report shows meaningful progress in leveraging digitalisation to transform the agricultural sector across all our regions, while

identifying areas which can be improved with targeted action.

Crucially, it outlines how Commonwealth countries can work with each other to achieve better results.

Using data and policy building blocks, we can help smallholder farmers to overcome the key systemic challenges - climate change, decreasing farm productivity, declining income across the value chain, poor access to finance, inequity for women and young people.

In doing so we can deliver micro- and macro-level impacts: including sustainable food and nutrition security and inclusive growth in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

I believe that this report offers a valuable step forward, not only for the Commonwealth but for low- and middle-income countries across the world.

It can assist national and international policymakers in understanding where to target their efforts.

It can provide the basis for knowledge exchange between countries: sharing with, and learning from, each other to improve efficiency and delivery.

And it outlines the vital coordination role governments can play to create an environment which enables innovation and delivery.

With the right policies, innovations and investment, we can meet the challenges of food and nutrition insecurity, climate change, youth unemployment and overall economic growth, and transform the Commonwealth into an agricultural powerhouse.

As ever, the Commonwealth Secretariat stands ready to assist all Commonwealth member countries.

And I offer the hand of friendship and partnership to governments and institutions outside the Commonwealth who share our values and aspirations.

We are - all of us - at our best when we work together.

And the scale of the challenge posed by climate change demands an unprecedented level of cooperation.

So let me finish by saying this: **whether you are in the Commonwealth or not, believe me, if we can make it work for the Commonwealth, we can make it work for the world.**

We are 56 countries, one third of humanity, stretching across five continents and all the great basins of our one shared ocean.

We have developed and developing economies.

Island states and land-locked states.

Some of the largest countries in the world, and some of the smallest.

Some of the most vibrant cities, and some of the most remote indigenous communities.

So we are part of the world, but we reflect the whole.

We must continue to break new ground, and forge new partnerships.

Digitalised agriculture is a golden opportunity to do just that: **so come with us, because we can only do this together - and there is no more time to waste.**

Thank you again for inviting me to join you today, I look forward to the discussions ahead and the progress we will make together.