

OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

DIALOGUE TITLE	Youth Digital Pathways in Agri-Food Systems: Leveraging Technology for Agricultural and Nutritional Transformation in Malawi
DIALOGUE DATE	Monday, 12 August 2024 07:00 GMT +02:00
CONVENED BY	Mike Khunga
EVENT LANGUAGE	English
HOST LOCATION	Lilongwe, Malawi
GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE	national
AFFILIATIONS	World Food Forum- International Youth Day marathon
DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE	https://nutritiondialogues.org/dialogue/53728/

The outcomes from Nutrition Dialogues will contribute to developing and identifying the most urgent and powerful ways to improve nutrition for all, with a focus on women and children and young people. Each Dialogue contributes in four distinct ways:

- Published as publicly available PDFs on the Nutrition Dialogues Portal
- Available as public data on the Nutrition Dialogues Portal "Explore Feedback" page
- Available publicly within a .xls file alongside all Feedback Form data for advanced analysis
- Synthesised into reports that cover which nutrition challenges are faced, what actions are urgently needed and how should these be taken forward – particular, in advance of the Nutrition for Growth Summit in Paris, March 2025.

SECTION ONE: PARTICIPATION

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

31

PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0	0-11	0	12-18	20	19-29
11	30-49	0	50-74	0	75+

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

11	Female	20	Male	0	Other/Prefer not to say
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NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

0	Children, Youth Groups and Students	18	Civil Society Organisations (including consumer groups and environmental organisations)
6	Educators and Teachers	0	Faith Leaders/Faith Communities
0	Financial Institutions and Technical Partners	0	Food Producers (including farmers)
0	Healthcare Professionals	0	Indigenous Peoples
0	Information and Technology Providers	0	Large Business and Food Retailers
0	Marketing and Advertising Experts	0	National/Federal Government Officials and Representatives
3	News and Media (e.g. Journalists)	0	Parents and Caregivers
0	Science and Academia	4	Small/Medium Enterprises
0	Sub-National/Local Government Officials and Representatives	0	United Nations
1	Women's Groups	0	Other (please state)

OTHER STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

NA

ADDITIONAL DETAIL ON PARTICIPANT DIVERSITY

The dialogue brought together a diverse group of participants, including young agri-entrepreneurs and youth dedicated to advancing food systems transformation. The event was open to everyone, regardless of their socio-economic background, ensuring inclusivity and broad representation. We carefully extended invitations to individuals who demonstrated a strong passion for food systems transformation and the potential to create meaningful impacts within their communities.

SECTION TWO: FRAMING AND DISCUSSION

FRAMING

The dialogue commenced with an introductory presentation on the World Food Forum, followed by insightful talks from guest speakers on technologies that young people can leverage to enhance food systems and nutrition within their communities. These presentations set the stage for engaging and focused roundtable discussions. The discussions revolved around the availability and potential of food systems technologies for Malawian youth. Participants explored a broad range of innovations, including technologies designed to improve soil health and those aimed at mitigating the impacts of climate change. The dialogue highlighted practical solutions and opportunities for young people to drive sustainable transformation in food systems.

DISCUSSION

Which digital technologies can Malawian youth utilize to drive food system transformation?

SECTION THREE: DIALOGUE OUTCOMES

CHALLENGES

Most participants highlighted malnutrition as a significant challenge, stemming from poor food production, limited access to markets for both consumers and small to medium enterprises (SMEs) to sell their produce. On the demand side, accessing nutritious food remains a critical issue, while on the supply side, challenges include the unavailability of agricultural inputs, limited knowledge and expertise in food systems, high farm gate prices, restricted market entry, lack of resources such as land, and the societal perception of agriculture. These factors collectively hinder youth participation in the food system, further limiting food availability.

URGENT ACTIONS

The most urgent action proposed during the dialogue was the need for the government to realign its policies to create opportunities for young people to test and implement innovative technologies in food systems production. Participants highlighted that some existing policies favor the use of imported machinery, which limits the adoption of locally developed, youth-led innovative solutions. Addressing this imbalance is essential to fostering homegrown technological advancements.

Another key issue raised was the lack of data sharing between government institutions and civil society. For example, the Department of Geological Survey collects substantial weather forecast data, yet this information is not readily accessible to young agri-entrepreneurs. Critical data, such as rainfall distribution across the country, remains out of reach for youth working to improve food systems. Making such information accessible would empower young people to make informed decisions and enhance productivity.

Moving forward, it was proposed to identify and connect young people working in agri-food systems with relevant government ministries to facilitate better access to data and resources. Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of advocating for policy realignment to support youth initiatives and expanding vocational training opportunities in food systems to equip young people with the skills and knowledge necessary for innovation and sustainability.

AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

Most participants emphasized the importance of integrating digital technologies into the school curriculum to enable young people to begin learning and adopting these tools at an early age. However, some participants raised concerns about the challenges posed by poor network coverage in rural areas, arguing that children in such communities would be disadvantaged compared to their urban counterparts.

Despite differing views, there was consensus on the need to subsidize internet costs, as the high cost of data in Malawi remains a significant barrier to digital inclusion. Additionally, promoting targeted digital technology training was suggested as a practical solution to ensure that young entrepreneurs can adopt and effectively utilize these technologies in their ventures.

OVERALL SUMMARY

Malawian youths have several opportunities to harness digital technologies for growth and innovation, especially in agriculture and entrepreneurship. Blockchain technology offers a pathway to develop new financing mechanisms, enabling young entrepreneurs to access decentralized financial systems and conduct transparent, secure transactions. Similarly, Artificial Intelligence (AI) provides young farmers with tools to make data-driven decisions, predict inputs and outputs, optimize crop yields, and improve overall efficiency in their agricultural practices.

Mobile money platforms have transformed access to financial services, allowing young people to easily transfer funds, purchase agricultural inputs, and manage finances without relying on traditional banking infrastructure. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) empower youths to improve agricultural productivity by monitoring resource usage, mapping soil quality, and tracking production data for precision agriculture. The Internet of Things (IoT) introduces the ability to use sensors and devices to monitor real-time conditions in agriculture, such as remotely tracking water usage for plants, which enhances resource management. Virtual Reality (VR) is another innovative tool, offering immersive environments for online agricultural orientations and capacity-building sessions, helping young people learn and adapt to modern farming techniques.

However, many young people face significant challenges in accessing and utilizing these technologies. Limited knowledge and digital literacy create barriers, as some technologies are complex and require specialized skills. Poor infrastructure, including limited internet coverage in rural areas and unreliable electricity, further restricts access. Cybersecurity concerns, such as fears of identity theft and online bullying, also discourage participation. Additionally, the high cost of digital devices and internet data in Malawi makes these technologies financially inaccessible for many young people.

To address these challenges, integrating digital technology into education curricula is critical to ensuring that young people begin learning about and adopting these tools at an early age. Targeted training programs tailored to specific technologies can further bridge the skills gap. Subsidizing internet costs, as seen with initiatives like TNM Pamtsetse and Airtel MoFaya, can help make connectivity more affordable. Expanding internet infrastructure to rural areas will also play a significant role in ensuring equitable access for all.

The government and private sector have crucial roles in fostering digital technology adoption among youths. Policymakers need to harmonize existing policies to create an environment that supports local innovation. For example, policies that heavily tax local technologies while favoring duty-free imports should be revisited to encourage the development and use of homegrown solutions. Partnerships between government institutions and the private sector are essential for sharing valuable resources and information. The Department of Geological Survey, for instance, collects extensive weather data that could benefit young agricultural entrepreneurs but is not readily accessible to them. Establishing platforms for training youths in agricultural technologies and encouraging practical application in the field would further enhance innovation and productivity.

Expanding digital technology infrastructure, particularly in underserved rural areas, will require collaboration between the government and private companies. Removing taxes on essential equipment and providing incentives for companies to operate in less profitable areas, such as building network towers, would significantly improve connectivity. Promoting inclusivity is equally important, with efforts needed to address barriers faced by marginalized groups. Expanding network coverage to rural areas, improving literacy levels, and addressing high dropout rates among girls are key steps toward ensuring equitable access to digital opportunities. Creating career plans in ICT for young women will also help bridge the gender gap in technology.

The private sector can play a pivotal role by facilitating access to digital technologies, expanding network coverage, and providing affordable connectivity solutions. With clear government policies and incentives, the private sector can be encouraged to invest in rural areas, thereby extending the reach of digital tools and opportunities.

SECTION FOUR: PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT & METHOD

PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

The dialogue adhered to principles of inclusive engagement, ensuring that everyone had the opportunity to contribute to the discussions and ask questions. The agenda was shared in advance, allowing participants to know what to expect. There were no competing interests, creating a focused and collaborative environment throughout the session.

METHOD AND SETTING

The dialogue was done online

ADVICE FOR OTHER CONVENORS

Send the communications in time and make sure to record the dialogues for future references if done online

FEEDBACK FORM: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the World Food Forum at global level for supporting the dialogues and member of the WFF Malawi chapter.

ATTACHMENTS

- <https://nutritiondialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Dialogue-Report-on-Leveraging-Digital-Technologies-for-Youth-Empowerment-in-Malawi.docx>