

Sustainable Development Goals

Technology and Data for SDGS

April 21, 2016

Remarks by Robynne Anderson, Discussant

Thank you Mr. Chairman

It has been a great honour to hear the comments today and to attempt to bring together some of the stands from the particular perspective of the private sector, specifically the agriculture sector I represent.

Many have the impression that technology is for “new” sectors; that farming - which represents a third of the world’s population, half its poor, and is the primary driver of rural development - needs no more than a plough. The sleepy vision of agriculture belies the reality that the most empowered farmers deploy technology regularly to improve yields, increase resilience, and to reduce the footprint of agriculture with sustainable intensification. Conservation tillage is an excellent example and has saved soil, water resources, and has reduced fossil fuel use. Farmers themselves took up this technology. Technology like Novozymes is producing energy from waste products like manure.

In the case of smallholders, that technology may take the form of better seeds, water harvesting methods, and grain storage. Some of these technologies are well known, but it is the risk management issues for someone to convert their farm – a complex eco-system – when they are living on less than a dollar or two a day. Our moderator cited the need for the CGIAR system and we couldn’t agree more in the need to

invest in public and private agricultural research. Another clear gap is agricultural extension systems, which have been largely gutted around the world. Also, to focus on livestock which too often takes a backseat to crops. Let's keep in mind, the dairy sector alone affects 1 billion of people's livelihoods – many of which are women driven. Finally, we cannot stress enough the need for insurance and risk management tools to allow farmers to uptake technology when they have only one crop or herd a year.

Mr. Steiner said we need to address sustainability and equity. Agriculture is a great example where we can further the sustainability and further the equity by furthering technology. It has a particular impact in rural areas where some of the greatest inequities exist. All that depends on technology, and also data. Farmers are huge developers and consumers of data and one gap is to fund the use of big data like geospatial and infrared to help agriculture, particularly in the light of climate change.

From an agriculture perspective we have only 14 harvests left to go to 2030. The needs and uptake are urgent.