

Biotech can help increase food security in sub-Saharan Africa but opportunities ignored

Transforming agriculture is central to sub-Saharan Africa's development prospects. Three-quarters of people in extreme poverty – existing on less than \$1.25 a day – live in rural areas, and crop yields across the region are often a fraction of those in developed countries.

Biotechnology offers an important opportunity to improve crops. In particular, genetic modification (GM) enables plant breeders to increase the potential of crops and reduce the timescales involved. It is especially useful in the case of African staples that have narrow gene pools or are slow-growing or difficult to cross.

But what typically determines whether a GM crop is approved for release in Africa is not a balanced, independent assessment of risks and benefits, but a political judgment shaped by distrust and suspicion of the technology.

As a result, GM crops are stuck on a treadmill of continual field trials. Governments are in effect attempting to balance the demands of pro- and anti-GM lobbies: proponents have a pipeline of technologies; opponents are appeased by the failure of any to gain approval.

This balancing act may be politically expedient, but it represents poor value for money for the public bodies and foundations funding research and does nothing for the farmers and consumers who could potentially benefit from GM crops.

Read the full, original article: [GM scaremongering in Africa is disarming the fight against poverty](#)