

## Millennials turn to tech to solve African farming challenges

For generations our farmers were told that they will be the next richest people of the world, due to a growing population sure to become the best and biggest market block that ever existed. With more than 70 percent of our continent practicing agriculture, our African pride and education prepared us to expect that a farmer will be the next [Mansa Musa](#).

In high school, we were always ready in our national examination to respond to the question: “What are the main problems and challenges facing African agriculture?” Sometimes the examination council would try to get students to think outside the box, twisting the same question to include African fisheries. Our memorized answer was always a list that started with archaic tools — lack of access to mechanization, trained labor, improved seeds and technology, to name a few.

My generation — and the one that preceded and will follow it — was trained to understand the factors limiting our agricultural development, though at the time climate change was somehow undetected. Maybe today’s curriculum should include eco-modernism and some chapters from Mark Lynas’ book, “[Six Degrees](#).” Though we understand the reasons why, African farming remains unprofitable and its failure has sent our youth on suicide missions across the Mediterranean in desperate hope of reaching the western World.

Along the way, we’ve been presented with a supposedly obvious and effective solution: get financing and mechanize the African farm. With the right financing plan, it could work, but what about the fall armyworm, pod borer and other pests infesting our plantations? Don’t worry, we’re told, just work your financing again, maybe get a loan and we’ll supply you with the pesticides and you should not forget to buy protective gear.

How can we save farming, improve farmers’ livelihoods, without falling into the borrow-and-spend trap, reverting to the same song we sang as students about the seemingly insurmountable limits to transforming our agriculture?

Yes, our farmers still need mechanization. But most importantly, we need precision agriculture that uses quality seeds — varieties resistant to diseases, pests and the droughts brought by climate change. Crops bred through the science of biotechnology offer benefits similar to mechanization, but they are developed in Africa, while tractors are not. Though biotech seeds have become embroiled in global politics and trade wars, access to them speaks to the fundamental right of our farmers to have choices, to be profitable and run prosperous communities.

Wait, there is more! Giving African farmers access to biotech crops is also a key to building a healthy society without malnutrition through bio-fortification, like vitamin A-enriched Golden Rice, that can fight hidden hunger and stunting in kids. Biotech crops can help feed our growing population while reducing the pollution caused by pesticide use in farming. The case of Bt-eggplant in Bangladesh, where the overall quantity of pesticide use decreased by 39 percent, is a living success story we all need to learn from.

We already know how technology has changed our lives recently — cellphones and MPesa have changed our lives for the good. Today, we are asked to turn out and embrace agricultural biotechnology. As our educated generation tries to transform our farms and communities through disruptive [FinTech](#), biotechnology is going to be the building block of precision agriculture that ensures our crops are a viable and bankable business so we use the profit to keep on mechanizing our lands.

African millennials are united for technology. Biotechnology, CRISPR and gene editing is a language we understand as tools for technological. To solve the enduring challenges facing African agriculture and achieve food security and prosperity, we are choosing biotechnology so that even the longtime failing crop insurance businesses and financial institutions can work with us to mechanize our lands.

Finance and trade are tools to drive the value to the client. Our values are always with us — we value the right for our people to have a choice. We stand for a healthy and prosperous Africa with enough food for us all. You must join us or dispute our choice, not take the unfair position of challenging our ability to make our own choices in responding to today's emergency.

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