

‘Science diplomacy’: What the Cold War can teach Africa about battling hunger with GM crops

It can be said the main problems facing the world are international in nature. No country can stand up today and say they will solve these complex issues on their own, with a case in point being the fight against the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

It is against this background that Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown is quoted in a report entitled [New Frontiers in Science Diplomacy](#) as saying, “Many of the challenges we face today are international and — whether it’s tackling climate change or fighting disease — these global problems require global solutions. This is why it is important that we create a new role for science in international policymaking and diplomacy to place science at the heart of the progressive international agenda.”

As Brown noted, scientific organizations were an important conduit for the discussion of nuclear issues between the United States and the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War. Today, science diplomacy offers an opportunity for countries in Africa to benefit from the complex scientific issues that are being discussed on the world stage.

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With the increase in global population and rapid industrialization, coupled with the devastating impact of climate change on the agricultural sector, the promise and potential of biotechnology should be placed at the forefront by most African governments in order to end hunger and poverty. Since agricultural biotechnology is a contentious issue in most African countries, common ground must be reached. This can only be achieved if the policymakers in Africa are willing to accept the importance of biotechnology in developing improved crops that support sustainability, as well as food and health security, in the face of climate change.

Biotechnology is already all around us and plays a big part in our lives, providing breakthrough products in health as well as agriculture. Most African countries concentrate on political diplomacy. Now they must place an equal emphasis on science diplomacy so that their countries can fully benefit from new breakthroughs in scientific research.

As evidenced during the Cold War, science diplomacy was a conduit for achieving peace, security and prosperity in the Global North. Now we must use it to similarly benefit the African continent.

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