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# Africa: The world's next breadbasket

**By Prof Arun Tiwari**

**THERE** are two kinds of events. One emerges from an ongoing process, unseen and unnoticed; it reaches a critical point, the idea gets precipitated into an event, and everyone notices it. The other type is an idea brewing in the thoughts of sensitive minds; it gathers traction, brings people together, and then takes a form that is more of a collective creation.

The Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods at the African Union Summit in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, held in June 2014, was an event that was both.

Goals were set up for ten years, with crystal clear objectives to create prosperous and healthy African societies through the transformation of the agricultural sector. These included achieving comprehensive food security and nutrition for all Africans, promoting sustainable farming practices, enhancing resilience to climate change, increasing investments in the farming sector by both governments and private entities and prioritising smallholder farmers, particularly women and youth, in agricultural policies and programmes. The Malabo Declaration builds on the principles of the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), which is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations.

Acknowledging the reality that Africa remains off-track in meeting key commitments like ending hunger by 2025, the Kampala Declaration of 2025 marked a decisive shift from a narrow focus on agriculture-led growth to a broader agri-food systems approach. The declaration issued a clarion call to end hunger and malnutrition by 2035. Taking the bull by the horns, it decided to pursue self-reliance in climate-

smart technologies to address agricultural productivity gaps.

What does this mean on the ground?

Climate-smart technologies are vital in closing agricultural productivity gaps by enhancing resilience and sustainability while addressing climate change challenges. First and foremost is precision agriculture, which involves using GPS, sensors and data analytics to optimise field-level crop farming management. It helps apply water, fertilisers and pesticides more efficiently, reducing waste and increasing yield.

Techniques such as no-till farming, cover cropping and crop rotation can improve soil health, increase carbon sequestration and enhance productivity. Innovations such as drip irrigation systems and rainwater harvesting can significantly improve water use efficiency, especially in regions susceptible to drought.

The tricky part is developing drought-resistant varieties, which are more resilient to drought and extreme weather events. These varieties can be cultivated using genetically modified organisms (GMOs) or traditional breeding techniques. In sub-Saharan Africa, only the South Africa allows the cultivation of a GMO variety of white maize for direct food consumption.

Almost no GMO food crops are legally grown anywhere in South Asia or Southeast Asia. In the Philippines, GMO sweetcorn is permitted; Bangladesh approved a limited commercialisation of GMO eggplant in 2013; and finally, in 2014, Indonesia brought in GMO sugarcane, but that is all. China permits GMO cotton but does not allow commercial farmers to plant GMO wheat, rice, corn or potato. It was only in 2024 that China approved GM corn and 14 soybean varieties to be bred for stronger herbicide and insect resistance and to produce higher yields. India has taken a very progressive stand and has exempted crops with certain kinds of genetic modifications from the regulations previously imposed on commercialising all genetically modified crops. The new policy exempts crops with simple tweaks to genes that are already 'natural' to the plant but have not added any 'foreign' DNA.

Due to global supply chains, GMO foods are proliferating even in those countries where they are not approved. Of course, genetically engineered foods currently available in the international market have passed safety assessments in their countries and are not likely to present risks to human health. In addition, no effects on human health have been shown from the consumption of such foods by the general

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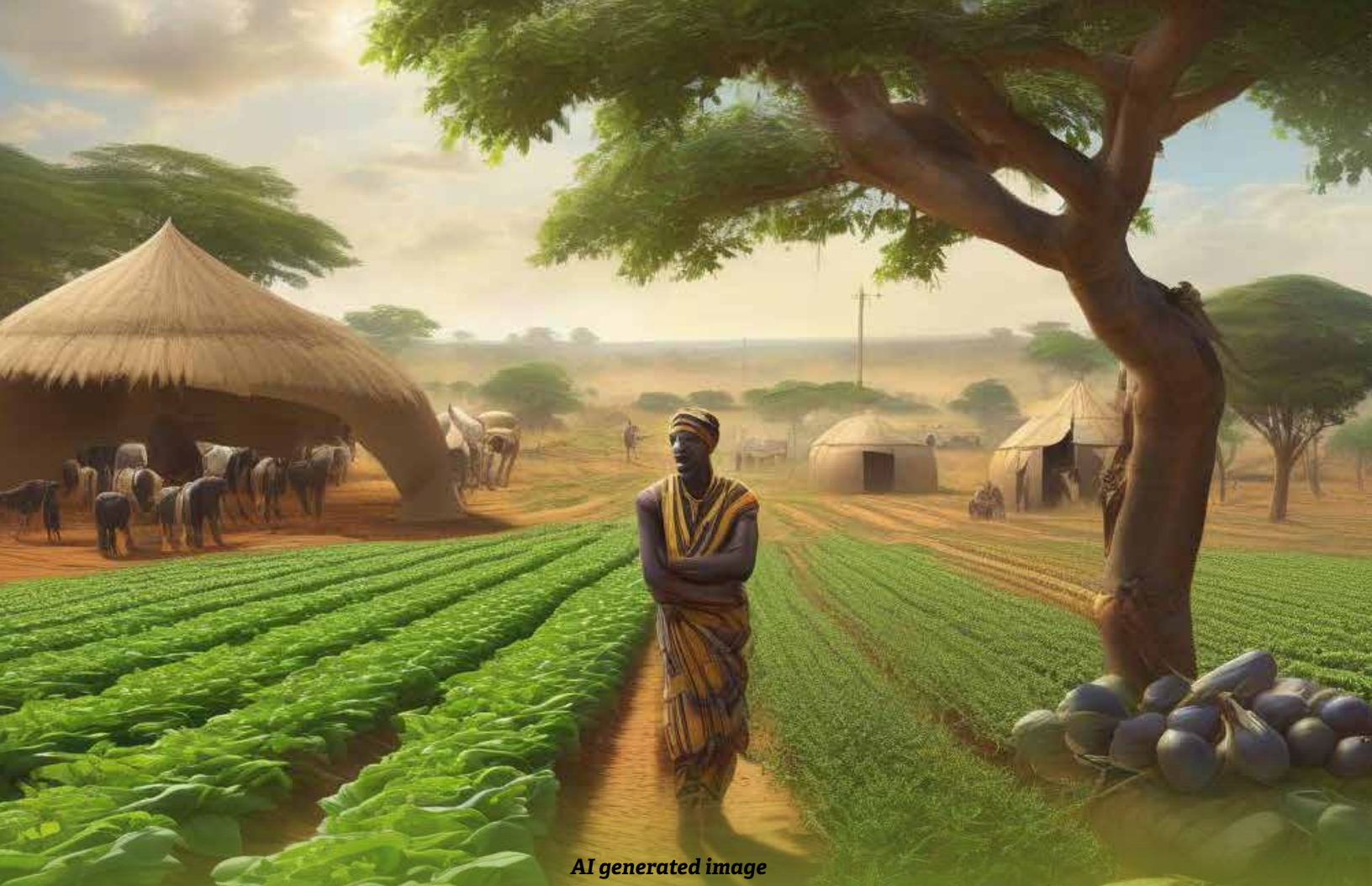

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population in the countries where they have been approved. India freely imports huge quantities, edible oil extracted from genetically altered oilseeds, and unfounded fears of their adverse impact are hurting farmers, consumers and the industry.

It is time for Africa to take the lead in deciding what is right for its people and show by example that smallholders need to be prosperous. Many smallholder farmers struggle with inadequate resources, including access to land, credit, education and technology, which can limit their agricultural productivity and income. This situation can lead to food insecurity for the farmers and the broader community, as they may struggle to produce enough food to meet local demand. Encouraging sustainable farming practices can lead to long-term productivity and environmental health improvements.

Africa urgently needs to lead in innovation and development rather than simply keeping pace with global trends. This proactive approach can address many pressing challenges the continent faces, including technology adoption, education and skill development. Focusing on environmentally sustainable practices in agriculture, industry and urban development can build resilience against climate change, promote economic growth and encourage entrepreneurship.

Undoubtedly, investment in infrastructure encompassing transportation, energy and digital networks has occurred. However, by promoting unique cultural narratives and innovations, Africa can shape global conversations and trends in the arts, fashion and technology. This proactive strategy can ultimately contribute to sustainable economic growth and an improved quality of life for its citizens. The Kampala Declaration of 2025 represents the most accurate expression of 21st century Africa. While it may focus primarily on agriculture, the Kampala Declaration 2025 testifies to the awakening of the African people and their freedom in the true sense and it will lead to far-reaching reforms. Much like no cloud forms in isolation to rain over a specific piece of land, and based on the winds, it rains over a wide area, the Kampala Declaration 2025 heralds the emergence of a New Africa. This Africa seeks to address global issues through its resources, which are no longer limited to gold, diamonds and even rare earth elements. Its true wealth lies in its people, their skills and their capacity to produce food—not only for their own population but also to significantly support the densely populated South Asia.

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