



Women market Bambara groundnut and jute mallow leaves in Mali. Credit: Charlie Mbosso, Bioversity International

Native African crops: Key assets in support of the Malabo Business Plan

Malabo Declaration Summary

I. Agriculture-led growth is a main strategy to achieve targets on food and nutrition security and shared prosperity

II. Enhancing investment finance in agriculture

III. Commitment to ending hunger in Africa by 2015

IV. Commitment to halving poverty by the year 2025 by inclusive growth

V. Commitment to boosting intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services

VI. Commitment to enhancing resilience of livelihoods and production systems to climate variability and other related risks

VII. Commitment to mutual accountability to action and results

VIII. Strengthening the African Union Commission to support delivery on these commitments

IX. Definition of actors and an action plan to achieve the commitments

The Malabo Declaration

The Malabo Declaration is a set of concrete goals for agricultural development adopted by Heads of State and Governments of the African Union in 2014 to achieve shared prosperity and improved livelihoods. The goals are to be attained by 2025.

Native crops strategic assets to attain the Malabo goals

Native African crops are key assets in achieving the goals set by the Malabo Declaration. The African continent is rich with diversity in cultivated, wild, and semi-wild edible plant species. This biodiversity is a relatively untapped resource for improving nutrition, sustainability, and income generation. Research and development have focused on promotion of a very limited number of staple and commodity crops—mostly introduced from outside of Africa—while great benefits await to be leveraged from local diversity.

Native African crops are well-adapted to the challenging growing conditions of the continent. Many have good pest and disease resistance and can be grown on marginal soils with low or no irrigation or inputs. Many African crops have superior or similar nutritional values to common global crops, with the added advantage of being able to produce under marginal conditions. In addition to high micronutrient content, some have nutraceutical values (e.g. low glycemic index, gluten free, high antioxidant content, etc.), which can be leveraged for marketing as high value superfoods. The fact that these crops are typically in the hands of the poor

means their development offers a unique opportunity for economic growth and empowerment. This basket of foods is ripe with opportunity for business development for smallholders, women, and youth with products that can support more nutritious and sustainable food systems. Some examples of high potential native African crops are listed below.

A selection of strategic native African crops

Underutilized African crops are found in all food groups and include cultivated, wild, and semi-wild species. A small selection of example species are as follows:

Short-cycle, gluten-free, nutrient-rich cereals: Finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*), fonio (*Digitaria exilis*), teff (*Eragrostis tef*)

Protein rich pulses: Bambara groundnut (*Vigna subterranea*), African locust bean (*Parkia biglobosa*), hamburger seed (*Mucuna sloanei*), African yam bean (*Sphenostylis stenocarpa*), Kersting's groundnut (*Macrotyloma geocarpum*), maramba bean (*Tylosema esculentum*)

Multipurpose trees that provide fruits, vegetables, forage and more: Baobab (*Adansonia digitata*), moringa (*Moringa oleifera*), balanzan tree (*Faidherbia albida*)

Nutritious indigenous leafy vegetables: Jute mallow (*Corchorus olitorius*), spider plant (*Cleome gynandra*), *Amaranth* sp.

Micronutrient rich fruits: Mobola plum (*Parinari curatellifolia*), marula fruit (*Sclerocarya birrea*)

Research and development to unlock the benefits of native African crops

Many native African crops are an important feature of local diets but they are not widely commercialized because of various supply and demand challenges. Often farmers have low incentive to produce and sell these crops because of high transaction costs, low competitiveness with more established crops, poor value chain organization, lack of access to credit and infrastructure, and poorly developed seed systems. Urban consumers are often not aware of these crops or they are considered “food of the poor”. Difficult processing and poor product quality are other important challenges to be overcome to increase demand. Investments in research and development can help overcome these bottlenecks to unlock the benefits of native African crops to help end hunger in the continent (Goal III), halve poverty through inclusive growth (Goal IV) and enhance the resilience of livelihoods and production systems to climate variability and other risks (Goal VI).

Native African crops in the Malabo Business Plan

The Malabo Business Plan (2017-2021) provides guidance for implementation and delivery of the commitments of the Malabo Declaration. It takes a programmatic approach to support the Malabo result areas (I-VII). The business plan does not elaborate details of the focus crops for development but implementers should be aware that native African crops are key assets for achieving the goals of eliminating hunger, reducing poverty, and enhancing climate resilience, which are covered by programmes 3, 4, and 6. For best impact, native African crops should be mainstreamed through all seven programmes of the Malabo business plan, as outlined in the following section:

Programme 1—Strengthening country and regional systems for Programme delivery:

Provide policy support and capacity building of national agriculture research systems for research and development of African crops; Integrate African crops in evidence-based and results-oriented programmes.

Programme 2—Expanding level and quality of public and private investments:

Encourage private and public investments in native African crops.

Programme 3—Increasing agricultural productivity and strengthening nutritional and food security:

Support improvement of post-harvest processing and management of African crops; integrate them in school feeding and nutrition programmes; use African crops for natural fortification; increase productivity by improving seed quality, yields and production of African crops.

Programme 4—Inclusive and sustainable agricultural production and accelerated agricultural growth:

Leverage African crops for water efficiency and sustainability; develop and disseminate technology for African crops; build entrepreneurship and value chains for African ‘superfoods’.

Programme 5—Achieving expanded and competitive intra-African trade in agriculture:

Develop food and trade standards for African crops; expand market infrastructure for these crops; use African crops to expand agricultural growth zones.

Programme 6—Enhanced resilience to climate change and improved risk management:

Support diversification of production systems with African crops for risk management and climate resilience.

Programme 7—Strengthening continental coordination, partnerships and mutual accountability for strategic results:

Foster and strengthen research and development partnerships and initiatives for African crops.

This assessment was made as part of the programme “Linking agrobiodiversity value chains, climate adaptation and nutrition: Empowering the poor to manage risk” supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the European Commission and the CGIAR Research Programmes on Climate Change Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) and Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH)

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Presented at the 4th Global Science Conference on Climate Smart Agriculture in Johannesburg, South Africa 28-30 November 2017



Bioversity International is a member of the CGIAR Consortium. CGIAR is a global research partnership for a food-secure future.

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