

AGRA's Technology Push in Africa

**A commentary by
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The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) is a \$400 million dollar enterprise funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and has the former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan as the Chairman of the Board. It is instructive to note that both AGRA and USAID top positions are filled with people that come from Monsanto and Dupont.² AGRA's website says it works for a comprehensive change in the areas of seeds, soils, market access, policy and partnerships to trigger an agricultural "green" revolution in Africa.

It would be remembered that in 1967, the Rockefeller Foundation teamed with the Ford Foundation to set up the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) located at Ibadan- Oyo State, Nigeria. The IITA is more or less a channel for the spread and deployment of GMOs on our continent. AGRA's main goal is to "sustain uniquely African Green Revolution"³

When Kofi Anan was announced as the chair of the AGRA board he stated quite unambiguously that GM technology would not be the means of achieving the dreams of AGRA. Within a few days that claim was denied by spokespersons that now insist that AGRA would not exclude any tool in the efforts to realise their dream. If one stretches the point, the tool they are looking at is GMOs.

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² Daniel Maingi: Why is Kofi Annan Fronting For Monsanto? The GMO Assault On Africa
<http://www.modernghana.com/news/294587/1/why-is-kofi-annan-fronting-for-monsanto-the-gmo-as.html>

³ Gates Foundation invests in Monsanto, Wed, 25 Aug 2010
<http://www.seattleglobaljustice.org/agra-watch>

ERA/FoEN has had occasions to demand a clarification of AGRA on their GM train. The answers have been that they would not use GM seeds as they influence smallholder farmers but would not exclude any available technologies.⁴

AGRA's TECHNOLOGY ALLIANCE:

In August 2010, AGRA Watch brought to public knowledge that Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was investing \$23.1 million, to acquire 500,000 of Monsanto's shares. It is common knowledge that Monsanto, one of the biggest gene giants seeks to dominate the world through the corporate control of seeds. There are no doubts about this. Jerry Archer sums Monsanto's corporate agenda better.⁵

"At a biotech industry conference in January 1999, a representative from Arthur Anderson, LLP explained how they had helped Monsanto design their strategic plan. First, his team asked Monsanto executives what their ideal future looked like in 15 to 20 years. The executives described a world with 100 percent of all commercial seeds genetically modified and patented. Anderson consultants then worked backwards from that goal, and developed the strategy and tactics to achieve it. They presented Monsanto with the steps and procedures needed to obtain a place of industry dominance in a world in which natural seeds were virtually extinct."

Under the pretence of helping "poor farmers" and to help eradicate "hunger" in Africa, Bill Gates had joined forces with a gene giant to spear head a multi-billion dollar effort to transform Africa into an experimental field for corporations. The public relations flagship for this effort is the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), a massive Green Revolution project. Up to now AGRA spokespeople have been slippery, and frankly, contradictory about their stance on GMOs."⁶

I have never entertained any doubts on what AGRA was set up to do in Africa - A machinery to destroy local seeds systems and replace it with their corporate controlled and gene revolutions.

Bill Gates and AGRA'S Flagship Programme:

Much of Gates agricultural programme focuses more on gene/scientific technology, markets, investments on seeds, lobbying and the involvement of the private sector and partners.

⁴ A Red Card for AGRA : Welcome address by Nnimmo Bassey at the opening session of the conference on *Land Grabs, AGRA and Non-Ecological Agriculture hosted by Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria 21-24 October 2009*

⁵ Gates Foundation Invests In Monsanto, Wed, 25 Aug 2010 13:

<http://www.seattleglobaljustice.org/agra-watch>

⁶ African Farmers Say No Thanks to the Bill Gates 'Green Revolution'

http://humanrights.change.org/blog/view/african_farmers_say_no_thanks_to_the_bill_gates_green_revolution

Five years ago, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation gave Dr. Sayre and the BioCassava Plus Project a \$12 million grant to use genetic engineering to significantly improve the cassava⁷.

In 2004, IITA, the Donald Danforth Plant Science Centre, National Agency for Biotechnology Development Agency and The Nigerian National Root Crops Research Institute of Nigeria had applied to the Federal Ministry of Environment in Nigeria, for an application for a “contained” field trial of GM cassava. It was reportedly being processed until early that year when IITA wrote to the Ministry to stop the application because the test (carried out by them in USA) failed to confer the resistance against the Cassava Mosaic Disease.⁸

In March 2009, we read about the unacceptable “approval” that was released at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, held in Chicago, the United States on the 13th of February 2009 by the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center (the “Danforth Center”) when they announced that Nigeria’s National Biosafety Committee (a committee with advisory powers, not given the mandate to approve) had given its approval for the Center, in St Louis, Missouri, to carry out field trials for Genetically Modified (GM) cassava in Nigeria.

In 2008, the Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA) program was launched, with a \$47 million grant from mega-rich philanthropists Warrant Buffet and Bill Gates. The program is supposed to help farmers in several African countries increase their yields with drought- and heat-tolerant corn varieties, but a report released that year by the African Centre for Biosafety had stated that WEMA is threatening Africa's food sovereignty and opening new markets for agribusiness giants like Monsanto⁹.

The Gates Foundation claims that biotechnology, GE crops and industrial inputs are needed to feed the world's growing population and programs like WEMA will help end poverty and hunger in the developing world. However from all the fact made available to us, we really question the motives behind all the projects they are undergoing in Africa.

⁷ Ann Delphus: US scientists use genetic engineering to protect vital cassava farming in Africa
URL: <http://news.inventhelp.com/Articles/Food-Beverage/Inventions/cassava-farming-12528.aspx>

⁸ Open Letter dated 24 May 2006, written by FoE Nigerian to the Federal Minister of Environment for clarification on the status of the applications reportedly received by the ministry for GMO cassava. The Ministry replied on 13th September, 2006, Ref. No: FMENV/EC/NBF/209/1, to say the application did not go through.

Also see:

Mariam Mayet: **“GM Cassava Fails in Africa,”** 9 October 2006. <http://www.biosafet yafrica.net>

The Donald Danforth Plant Science Center: **“Danforth Center Cassava Viral Resistance Review Update,”** June 30, 2006. <http://www.danforth centre.org/ newsmedia/ NewsDetail. asp?nid=121>; and Danforth Centre, Cassava Update <http://www.danforth centre.org/ newsmedia/ NewsDetail. asp?nid=119>, <http://www.danforth center.org>

⁹ Mike Ludwig: 12 July 2011: Monsanto and Gates Foundation Push GE Crops on Africa

It is worthy to note that the agency that is implementing WEMA is the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), an ardent biotechnology group funded completely by the US government's USAID program, the United Kingdom and the Buffet and Gates foundations.

In September , 2010, the former Vice President of AGRA, Akinwumi Adesina, now Minister of Agriculture in the Federal Republic of Nigeria said decidedly at a conference in Ghana, that “we have laid out a very clear action plan on what needs to accelerate the pace of the Green Revolution in terms of technologies, policies, finance and infrastructure investments,”¹⁰

On March 9, 2011, AGRA doled out \$400-million for subsidized fertilizer and hybrid seeds, to help “boost yields” a move that was condemned as being unsustainable, by De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.¹¹

In September 2011, Kofi Annan, convened a conference in Ghana. The purpose of the meeting was to create a “united effort to accelerate African Green Revolution in Africa”.

It is worthy to note that the bulk of the projects funded by Gates and its brainchild AGRA, **favor scientific and technological solutions that support** high-tech industrial agricultural methods and inputs, patenting of seeds, lobbying for genetically modified crops, increasing farmers' indebtedness and dependence on chemicals, protects corporate interest and encourages land consolidation.

It is worthy to note that the biotech industry targets people's staple crops even when there is no need for GM varieties. Case in point is the effort to genetically modify cassava in Nigeria to fight a leaf mosaic disease. There are local varieties that successfully withstand the same disease, but the industry is bent on introducing their own unwanted genetically modified variety.

AGRA and the Hunger Issue:

Hunger has been utilized as a political tool to push African nations to open their doors for the dumping of unwholesome foods. While hunger is being peddled as a major reason why Africa must accept genetically modified foods, more than a billion people go to bed hungry globally and about double that number suffer malnutrition because they are fed or underfed with foods that are not healthy. The Zambian situation of 2004 is a good example. The Zambian government refused genetically modified (GM) corn in the food aid that was to be given to them from the United States through the World Food Programme.

¹⁰ Naomi Antony: 10 September 2010: Green Revolution plan agreed at Ghana meeting
<<http://www.scidev.net/en/news/green-revolution-plan-agreed-at-ghana-meeting.html>>

¹¹ Tom Paulson: March 9, 2011: Eco-farming best for poor, UN expert says, not Gates Foundation approach
<http://humanosphere.kplu.org/2011/03/eco-farming-could-feed-the-world-un-expert-says-challenging-gates-foundations-approach/>

They did that for safety concerns and fear that the grains might unintentionally get planted if they were distributed to the people.¹² The Zambians survived because there was food in other regions of the country which international donors were not willing to buy. It is incomprehensible to me why the WFP will rather buy food that is alien, tainted, not culturally acceptable and from overseas, instead of buying locally. I have not quite resolved the puzzle.

It would be noted that efforts at popularizing GM crops by USAID and the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture and their allies have been carried out in circles that excluded critical opinion. Local people and farmers generally reject this technology. A case in point is the cassava that was engineered to overcome the cassava leaf mosaic disease: this has so far failed, and there are already non-GM varieties that withstand the disease. The biotech agencies are not giving up on this. The big question that is begging for an answer is why waste resources that could be better used to strengthen agricultural production in Africa drawing on the rich pool of local knowledge and ensuring food sovereignty? A recent report by the Oakland Institute explains the opinions of the majority of peoples in African countries who in response to the Gates Foundation's and AGRA efforts demand respect for their indigenous knowledge and locally appropriate technologies.

What Do WE Want?

If AGRA wants to help "poor" and "hungry" Africans, how about first not doing us any harm? Secondly Why not ask us what we want rather than apply technologies that are detached from the local system? That should have been the starting point instead of bullying us into accepting a corporate driven agenda. We do not want AGRA. AGRA is a donor driven initiative with its own interests. Corporations will control our seeds, land, food and then our lives. AGRA is not in the best interest of Africans. It is business - Agribusiness

We insist on the utilization of the vital outcomes of the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) review. The report made twenty key findings, amongst which was a call for far greater emphasis on agro-ecological approaches. The report concludes thus:

'Organic agriculture can increase agricultural productivity and can raise incomes with low-cost, locally available and appropriate technologies, without causing environmental damage. Furthermore, evidence shows that organic agriculture can build up natural resources, strengthen communities and improve human capacity, thus improving food security by addressing many different causal factors simultaneously'

¹² FoEI, 2003. Playing with Hunger.
http://www.foei.org/publications/pdfs/playing_with_hunger2.pdf

If you truly want to help farmers, implement the IAASTD report, based on four years of deliberation and scientific, social science and economic analysis. We do not want our Continent Africa contaminated under any guise or form.

In March this year, the UN issued a report urging “eco-farming” as the best strategy for improving farming in the developed world. In it, the author challenged the wisdom of the Gates Foundation’s approach in agricultural development.¹³

De Schutter was quoted in the report as saying *“Most efforts in the past have focused on improving seeds and ensuring that farmers are provided with a set of inputs that can increase yields, replicating the model of industrial processes in which external inputs serve to produce outputs in a linear model of production. Instead, agroecology seeks to improve the sustainability of agroecosystems by mimicking nature instead of industry. Eco-farming doesn’t require expensive inputs of fossil-fuel- based pesticides, fertilisers, machinery or hybrid seeds. It is ideally suited for poor smallholder farmers and herders who are the bulk of the one billion hungry people in the world. Efforts by governments and major donors such as the 400-million-dollar Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) to subsidise fertilizer and hybrid seeds will produce quick boosts in yields but are not sustainable in the long term”*

Conclusion:

In Nigeria and especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, majority of the farmers are women, most of them farm their lands with the help of their children. In most African countries women are generally assigned the role of buying the food items and or gathering them, preparing and serving them to the other members of the household. *“A woman feeds her husband, then her children, other members of the household, and finally.... with whatever is left....she feeds herself. Even pregnant women and breast-feeding women eat last when, of all times, they should eat first” If hunger had a face, it would be the face of a woman. And the face of the person who can best end hunger is the face of a woman, too.”*¹⁴

If AGRA carries on with its scientific revolution, where seeds will become a commodity and traditional and ecologically farming gives way for a toxic and corporate controlled and monopolistic system, women will definitely be the worst hit. More often than not, the duty of providing for the nutritional needs of the family or community rests on them.

¹³Tom Paulson: March 9, 2011: Eco-farming best for poor, UN expert says, not Gates Foundation approach <http://humanosphere.kplu.org/2011/03/eco-farming-could-feed-the-world-un-expert-says-challenging-gates-foundations-approach/>

¹⁴ Elizabeth Jeiyol : Gender Dimensions of Hunger, presentation made at the National Environmental Consultation (NEC) on “The Politics of Hunger” held in Abuja, Nigeria on the 16th to 19th November, 2010. Hosted by Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria

We do not believe “hunger” in Africa will be solved by AGRA’s corporate agenda- it will rather compound the problem. People are hungry because of the great gap between those who “have” and the “have nots”, not because of the lack of food in the world.

We do not believe that Bill Gates Foundation through its pet project AGRA, together with partners like Monsanto can save the world from Hunger. They should stop politicizing hunger. The technologies that are promoted by them for our people are not farmer nor environmentally friendly. Some of them have not been tested fully to determine their effects on the environment and consumers. African farmers are seeking food sovereignty; do not impose unwholesome foods and GMOs!

Finally, the answer to the food needs of Africans will come from Africa. We are blessed with good vegetation, rich soil, bequest of local wisdom in agriculture and farming. Ecological agriculture is what we need and is more important than any Revolution.