INTRODUCTION

by Anuradha Mittal

Chronic hunger affects hundreds of millions of people worldwide but it is most deeply entrenched in Africa. In 2004, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated that the number of chronically malnourished in the world had increased to 854 million, with the situation in sub-Saharan Africa being the most dire: the absolute number of hungry people increased from 169 million to 212 million.

This grave situation was further worsened by an 83 percent increase in global food prices between 2005 and 2008. Provisional FAO estimates show that rising prices have plunged an additional 75 million people globally below the hunger threshold, of which 24 million are in sub-Saharan Africa.

A crisis of this proportion raises major questions about industrial agriculture and how best to address the needs of the hungry. The global food crisis requires intervention and a paradigm shift that recognizes agriculture as fundamental to the well-being of all people, both in terms of access to safe and nutritious food and as the foundation of healthy communities, cultures, and the environment. Unfortunately, the 2008 food crisis—especially the widespread hunger and poverty in Africa—is being used to make the case for addressing hunger by increasing agricultural production through technical solutions such as genetically engineered (GE) crops. Nowhere in the process of crafting solutions are the voices and experiences of Africans, especially African farmers, included.

Conveying a False Sense of Need

In June 2008, the United Nations held a High-Level Conference on Food Security that gained much prominence in the midst of the food crisis and became a key venue to promote genetically engineered food as a solution to world hunger.

At a United States-led briefing on the sidelines of the conference, Ed Schafer, the former U.S. Agriculture Secretary under George W. Bush, urged genetically-modified organisms (GMOs) are key to producing more food by raising yields and growing disease and pest-resistant crops in developing nations. Gaddi Vasquez, the U.S. ambassador to the FAO in Rome, also promoted GM crops as one of the most promising ways to increase crop yields. The Bush Administration even managed to sneak GMOs into the U.S. aid package to ease the world food crisis; the U.S. Agency for International Development was directed to earmark $150 million of aid for development farming, which includes the use of GM crops.

Yet, months before this U.N. conference an independent and multi-stakeholder assessment of agriculture concluded that a radical change was needed in agriculture around the world. The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) issued a report, backed by 58 governments, which concluded that agriculture policy and practice must be changed to address hunger and poverty, social inequities, and environmental sustainability. The report highlighted the lingering doubts and uncertainties surrounding GMOs and held that GM crops are unlikely to play a substantial role in addressing the needs of poor farmers, as the biotechnology industry dominates agricultural research and development at the expense of other agricultural sciences.

Despite the overwhelming opposition to genetic engineering and chemical-input based agriculture, the biotech industry—with assistance from rich donor nations, multilateral institutions, and the philanthropic community—has used the food price crisis to gain support for GM crops. The result of the biotech industry's well-financed publicity blitz based on "green washing" (biotech is environmentally friendly) and "poor washing" (we must accept genetic engineering to increase yields to end hunger, reduce costs, and improve livelihoods of farmers), have been calls for a "new" Green Revolution, especially in Africa.

AGRA: Main Driver for a New Green Revolution for Africa

"They [African farmers] need a revolution in policies that will address the underlying long-term problems they face. ...The time for bringing forth a Green Revolution for Africa is now."

—Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, Vice President for Policy and Partnerships, AGRA, at a conference on hunger in Dublin

Several actors, including the Yara Foundation, Millennium Villages, and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), among others, have been actively rallying for GE crops in Africa for some time. The involvement of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), a widely hailed U.S. philanthropic effort backed by major foundations, has pushed the promotion of a technology-based agricultural revolution to the forefront of policy debate for the continent. Launched in September 2006 as a joint initiative between the Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, AGRA expands on the Rockefeller Foundation's Green Revolution in Africa Initiative. Founded with an initial commitment of $100 million from the Gates Foundation and another $50 million from the Rockefeller Foundation, today AGRA is the biggest grantee of the Gates Foundation. With over $262 million committed, AGRA is poised to become one of the main institutional vehicles for changing African agriculture.

The extent of AGRA's reach is evident from its unprecedented partnerships with key players in the agricultural arena. At the FAO High-Level Conference on World Food Security in Rome, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between AGRA, FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Food Programme (WFP) that called for using the Green Revolution to turn Africa's breadbasket regions into a source of emergency food aid for the continent. AGRA has also joined forces with the Millennium Challenge Corp., which was established by the Bush Administration to work with poor countries that guarantee "good governance" and "open economic systems" to battle the food crisis in Africa.

AGRA: An African-led Green Revolution?

"AGRA is an African face and voice for our work and also informs our work as a key strategic partner...."

—Agricultural Development Strategy 2008-2011, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

AGRA first gained momentum in June 2007 with the appointment of Kofi Annan, the former United Nations secretary-general, as its chairman. Under Annan's direction, AGRA's stated goal is "to trigger an African-led Green Revolution that will transform African agriculture...." However, AGRA's agenda of a Green Revolution for Africa has come under heavy criticism from African civil society. At the World Forum for Food Sovereignty at Nyeleni, Mali in 2007, African farmer, agricultural, and pastoralist organizations categorically rejected the idea that Kofi Annan could speak on behalf of over 50 countries and 680 million people.

Despite the Gates Foundation's rhetoric, AGRA's vision for agricultural development was not drawn up by African voices, nor does it take into account developing countries' experience with the first Green Revolution. Instead, this agricultural revolution for Africa was designed by Gordon Conway, President of the Rockefeller Foundation through 2004. He outlined his plan in his book *The Doubly Green Revolution: Food For All in the 21st Century.*

The appointment of key staff at the Gates Foundation is also indicative of the direction that AGRA intends to steer agriculture in Africa. In 2006, the Gates Foundation appointed Dr. Robert Horsch as the Senior Program Officer in the Global Development Program, which directly supervises the AGRA initiative. Horsch came to the foundation after 25 years on the staff of the Monsanto Corporation, one of the world's biggest biotechnology multinationals and one of the most aggressive promoters of GM crops. At Monsanto, Horsch was the Vice-President for Product and Technology Cooperation, later Vice-President for International Development Partnership, and also a member of the team that developed Monsanto's YieldGard, BollGard, and RoundUp Ready technologies.

Another major player hailing from the St. Louis biotech hub is Lawrence Kent of the Danforth Center, an institute that is heavily funded by Monsanto. Following Horsch's and Kent's appointments, the Danforth Center's president, Roger Beachy, said that it wouldn't hurt to have two people familiar with St. Louis researchers holding the strings to the Gates Foundation's large purse. Unsurprisinglu, on January 8, 2009, St. Louis Post Dispatch reported that the Gates Foundation has awarded a $5.4 million grant to the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center, to "help the center secure the approval of African governments to allow field testing of genetically modified banana, rice, sorghum and cassava plants that have been fortified with vitamins, minerals and proteins."

Lutz Goedde, another hire from the biotech industry, is the former CEO and President of Alta Genetics, and is credited with making Alta the world's largest privately owned cattle genetics improvement and artificial insemination company. All three are working for the Gates Foundation, funding projects aimed at the developing world.

The appointment of Kofi Annan as AGRA's chairman was a strategic decision that the Gates Foundation made to silence criticisms that its agricultural development agenda

was a "White Man's Dream for Africa." In fact, this more reeks of Monsanto's campaign: *"Let the Harvest Begin."* Launched in 1998 to gain acceptance of GE crops around the world by projecting the benefits of the Green Revolution in Asia and its potential in Africa, Monsanto's campaign managed to draw several respected African leaders, such as Nelson Mandela, to speak for a new Green Revolution in Africa. In response, all of the African delegates (except South Africa) to the UN Food and Agriculture Negotiations on the International Undertaking for Plant Genetic Resources in June 1998 issued a counter statement, *"Let Nature's Harvest Continue."* The delegates clearly stated their objection to multinational companies' use of the image of the poor and hungry from African countries to push technology that is not safe, environmentally friendly, or economically beneficial.

Lack of Accountability, Transparency, and Stakeholder Involvement

"I came away very much wanting to work more closely with agro-ecological groups. We talk to anyone who will talk to us. How could we aspire to be transformational if we didn't?"

—Rajiv Shah, quoted in A Green Revolution for Africa? New York Times, October 10, 2008

With the announcement of AGRA, the agricultural development agenda of the foundation has come under heavy scrutiny by civil society groups and social movements. To quell some of this criticism, Rajiv Shah, the Gates Foundation's Director of Agricultural Development, traveled around the U.S. in 2008 supposedly to meet with groups and solicit input from agricultural scientists, economists,

We have engaged a broad group of internal and external advisors as part of our strategy development process

List of reviewers

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Source: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Agricultural Development Strategy 2008-2011. p. 113.

and rural sociologists through so-called listening roundtables. However, it is not evident how this input has been incorporated into foundation activities.

More important, it is not apparent how, and if, African farmers have been consulted by the foundation before they launched their multi-million dollar development strategy. It will be very important to know what their reaction to the foundation's strategy is. Not one of those consulted for the foundation's agricultural strategy—not the reviewers or the external advisory board members—is a farmer from Africa. However, external advisors like Ruth Oniang'o, who is closely associated with some of the African political elite, can be found on Monsanto's web pages claiming that there is an urgent need for food biotechnology in Africa. (http://www.monsanto.com/biotech-gmo/asp/experts.asp?id=RuthOniango)

Already locked into tight competition in the commercial seeds market, Pioneer hopes that success with biotech sorghum, in collaboration with Gates Foundation, might help open doors for other biotech crops in countries currently skeptical of genetically modified crops.

In the wake of popular global resistance to GM crops, the Gates Foundation has been deliberately vague about its decision-making process and unclear about its role in the promotion of the use of genetically engineered seeds. However, the foundation continues to spend millions of dollars on the development of genetically engineered "nutritious" bananas, cassava, rice, and sorghum. It awarded a $16.9 million grant for a project in Iowa aimed at making sorghum into a more easily digestible crop that is richer in vitamins A and E, iron, zinc, amino acids, and protein. A key partner of this endeavor is Pioneer Hi-Bred International, a subsidiary of Dupont, which has donated $4.8 million in gene technology. Already locked into tight competition in the commercial seeds market, Pioneer hopes that success with biotech sorghum, in collaboration with Gates Foundation, might help open doors for other biotech crops in countries currently skeptical of genetically modified crops.

The Gates Foundation is also providing advocacy grants to support policy and institutional reforms around GMOs at the national and regional levels. The foundation describes this in its strategy paper as developing "policy space around GMOs" and creating "an appropriate enabling environment." One of the potential grantees under this scheme is Calestous Juma, professor at John F. Kennedy's School of Government through Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANPRAN). At the 2008 G8 summit in Japan, Juma, who co-chaired the African Union's High-Level Panel on Modern Biotechnology, took it upon himself to urge the G8 to "Get Biotechnology on the Agenda for Africa." While hailing the Gates Foundation's $47 million grant to the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) to engineer drought-resistant maize and praising Monsanto for offering "proprietary genetic material and advanced breeding techniques," Juma criticized GMO opponents as "advocacy groups in industrialized countries who purport to speak for developing countries" and accused them of showing little interest in the welfare of the people they claim to be protecting.

Around the safety issue, Juma discarded the application of the precautionary principle, and advocated that the demand that products be proven safe before commercialization has denied Africa a crucial chance to learn to use the technology, and that such demands are ploys used to stall the adoption of new technologies by other vested interests. His key message, yet again, is poor washing: "by failing to adopt biotechnology, Africa puts its poor populations at greater risk of starvation." This kind of communications strategy, used aggressively to promote GM crops, is viewed by the Gates Foundation as creating "an appropriate enabling environment."

'Land Mobility': AGRA's Goal and Vision of Success

The Executive Summary of the Gates Foundation's confidential Agricultural Development Strategy 2008-2011 outlines its theory of change: "Smallholders with the potential to produce a surplus can create a market-oriented agricultural system serving the health and welfare needs of rural populations to exit poverty...The vision of success involves market-oriented farmers operating profitable farms that generate enough income to sustain their rise out of poverty. Over time, this will require some degree of land mobility and a lower percentage of total employment involved in direct agricultural production."

Despite the foundation's claims that it invests in agricultural development because a growing majority of the

world's poor are reliant on agriculture, the Strategy plan clearly emphasizes moving people out of the agriculture sector. This is in the name of reducing dependency on agriculture, but it doesn't specify where and how this new "land mobile" population is to be reemployed.

Business as Usual

"Despite the "new" tag added to its name, the Green Revolution prescribed for Africa basically follows the same formula used in Asia—a technology package for agriculture involving the use of external inputs, massive agricultural infrastructure and modern seeds, but with the twist of genetically modified seeds added into the equation to respond to the environmental consequences caused by the old formula."

—Unmasking the New Green Revolution in Africa: Motives, Players and Dynamics

Despite massive opposition to chemical-based agriculture from a broad and diverse social movement of farmers, peasants, indigenous peoples, consumers, environmentalists, and agricultural scientists, AGRA promotes the conventional wisdom of the industrial and market-based agriculture agenda for the whole of Africa—in complete disregard of several prominent studies that emphasize the potential for a different vision for the future.

The 2008 study by the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the U.N. Environment Program (UNEP), *Organic Agriculture and Food Security in Africa,* found that organic agriculture outperformed conventional production systems based on chemical-intensive farming and is thus more conducive to food security in Africa. An analysis of 114 projects in 24 African countries demonstrated that yields more than doubled where organic, or near-organic, practices had been used. The research also found strong environmental benefits such as improved soil fertility, better retention of water, and resistance to drought in these areas.

In its independent assessment of agriculture, IAASTD emphasized that "the way the world grows its food will have to change radically to better serve the poor and hungry if the world is to cope with growing population and climate change while avoiding social breakdown and environmental collapse." IAASTD specifically called for more attention to small-scale farmers and sustainable agricultural practices, specifically mentioning organic farming as an option several times. Yet the Gates Foundation's 127-page long Agriculture Development Strategy fails to mention organic or agroecological production even once.

AGRA Ignores Structural Causes of Agricultural Productivity Decline and Hunger & Poverty in Africa

Because of undue emphasis on science and technology along with market access—both assumed to be the silver bullet solution to Africa's hunger and poverty—the structural factors responsible for hunger and poverty in Africa do not make it into AGRA's agricultural plan.

For instance, the Gates Foundation and AGRA ignore:

Decline in Investment in Agriculture Resulting from Externally Imposed Conditionalities

Conditionalities imposed by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) have prevented African nations from developing viable farm sectors, thereby eroding their ability to maintain agricultural production and increasing their reliance on imported food. Spending on agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa, a region heavily reliant on agriculture for overall growth, accounts for only 4 percent of total government spending and the sector continues to be taxed at relatively high levels. This agricultural fiscal policy owes its origins to the World Bank's structural adjustment program loans (SAPs) that mandated a reduction in government support of agriculture.

These externally imposed conditionalities prevented much needed investments in agriculture: national government funding of agricultural research fell by 27 percent in sub-Saharan Africa between 1981 and 2000, with many governments currently allocating less than 1 percent of their national budgets to the sector. Only a few countries have adhered to the 2003 Maputo Declaration, which established that 10 percent of budgetary allocations should go to agriculture and rural development by 2008.

Multilateral investment in agricultural projects and agricultural research by the governments of rich nations and institutions such as the World Bank has also steadily declined. Just 4 percent of current development aid to Africa goes to agriculture, and agricultural research grants were cut by more than half—from $6 billion a year to $2.8 billion—between 1980 and 2006. The Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) report on the World Bank's agricultural programs in sub-Saharan Africa between 1991 and 2006

found that the Bank channelled only $2.8 billion in lending to agriculture, constituting just 8 percent of its lending to the region.

Reduced State Regulatory Role in Agricultural Production and Trade

In the 1980s and 1990s, the World Bank strongly encouraged countries to end their governments' regulatory roles in agriculture, for example, eliminating agricultural marketing boards. Marketing boards were tasked with buying agricultural commodities from farmers at fixed prices, keeping the commodities in a rolling stock, and releasing them into the market in the event of a bad harvest in following years. Marketing boards also organized the redistribution of food from surplus to deficit areas of the country. By preventing price volatility, marketing boards protected both producers and consumers against sharp price rises or drops, prioritized self-sufficiency, and thus reduced the need for food imports and for foreign exchange earnings to pay for them.

After over two decades of economic liberalization and related reform, the promised or expected gains in growth and stability are yet to be seen. The 2008 food crisis and the vulnerability of food-insecure African countries underscore the fact that the goals of state intervention remain valid.

Removal of Agricultural Tariffs and Resulting Import Surges

"We will use our voice to advocate on key issues, however we choose not to engage in highly-publicized issues (e.g. OECD subsidies).

—Agricultural Development Strategy, 2008-2011, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

For a foundation that works to promote the well being of poor Africans, the above statement from the foundation's strategy report tells a different story. The Gates Foundation's promotion of agricultural liberalization but silence on the issue of subsidies hardly reflects well on its stated goals. The indiscriminate opening of markets has taken away countries' ability to govern the flow of agricultural imports into their borders, while heavily subsidized agriculture has allowed industrialized countries to capture developing country markets by dumping commodities below their cost of production. The flood of heavily subsidized cheap farm imports has made subsistence farming in developing countries, especially in Africa, uncompetitive and financially unstable with devastating consequences for the rural poor and local economies.

Market Access Equals the Pathway Out of Poverty?

A key component of the Gates Foundation's strategy is the promotion of cash crops, which, along with access to markets, is what it views as the pathway out of poverty. Already, nearly a quarter of African countries depend on a single commodity for 50 percent or more of their export income and more than 20 countries rely on two or three commodities for at least half of their export earnings. The Gates Foundation's strategy to promote cash crops overlooks the reality that the real prices of these commodities are volatile, and, as a direct consequence, commodity-dependent countries are subject to great risk, which affects macroeconomic performance as well as household income distribution. For example, as coffee prices in 2002 fell to less than a third of their 1997 level, Uganda, a country that implemented the economic reforms proposed in the 1990s and increased coffee production for export rather than enhance food security, was deeply impacted by the decline in world coffee prices.

Specialization in a few commodities for export, such as coffee or cocoa, has increased Africa's dependence on food imports from developed countries. Since 1995, the region has seen twice as many new acres of cotton production as new acres of corn, and 50 percent more new acres of cocoa beans than new acres of millet. While farmers have been encouraged to grow cash crops like coffee, sugar, cocoa beans, tea, and cotton for export, export earnings are used to purchase food, often low-priced (through government subsidies) imports from industrialized countries, even as this process displaces small farmers.

Project to improve rain-fed crop production in Quthing District, Lesotho. *Credit: IFAD, Giuseppe Bizzarri*

African Opposition

Promotional campaigns for a Green Revolution regularly feature a handful of African spokespeople–like Florence Wambugu, a Monsanto-trained biotechnician, or Ruth Oniang'o, external advisor to the Gates Foundation. In the mainstream media, their voices calling for technology to save Africa drown out the genuine voices of farmers, researchers, and civil society groups, and these spokespeople build support for efforts such as AGRA. But there is widespread questioning of and opposition to technology-based solutions to hunger and poverty, especially genetic engineering of agriculture, in Africa.

Africa has been largely united against GM crops, opting instead for comprehensive policy interventions supporting family farmers to produce and trade their crops in a sustainable manner. Even when faced with dire situations of hunger, African countries have still chosen to protect biodiversity over accepting GM food aid, as was the case with Zambia in 2002.

Voices from Africa is part of our mandate to ensure space for democratic debate and public participation on social, economic, and environmental issues that affect our lives and thus aims to bring to light the real African views on technological solutions to hunger and poverty on the continent. Unsurprisingly, African farmers, supported by researchers, are the most astute and ardent critics of technological solutions to poverty and hunger. It is crucial, particularly in this time of poor washing amidst growing hunger, that their voices be heard.

Voices from Africa is a compilation of views, essays, and statements by the leading voices of African opposition to genetic engineering and tells the stories of their struggles. It is our hope that it will break through the rhetoric, debunk the myths surrounding the purported need for a Green Revolution in Africa, and reframe the debate to ensure food sovereignty for Africa and her people.

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A Statement by Friends of the Earth—Africa at the Annual General Meeting held at Accra, Ghana, 7-11 July 2008

Members of FoE Africa from Ghana, Togo, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Nigeria, Mauritius, Tunisia and Swaziland met for five days in Accra, Ghana reviewing issues that confront the African environment. A particular focus was placed on the current food crisis and agrofuels on the continent.

FoE Africa groups deplored the characterization of Africa as a chronically hungry continent; and rejected the projection of the continent as an emblem of poverty and stagnation and thus as a continent dependent on food aid. FoE Africa reiterated the fact that the agricultural fortunes of the continent have been dimmed by externally generated neoliberal policies including Structural Adjustment Programmes imposed on the continent by the World Bank, IMF (International Monetary Fund) and other IFIs.

FoE Africa expressed disgust at the manner by which the burden for solutions to every crisis faced by the North is shifted onto Africa. Examples include the climate change and energy crises wherein the burden has been inequitably placed on the continent. Africa is forced to adapt to climate impacts and she is also being targeted as the farmland for production of agrofuels to feed the factories and machines in the North.

FoE Africa resolved as follows:

1. Africa contributed very little to climate change and the North owes her an historical debt to bear the costs of adaptation without seeking to further burden the continent through so-called carbon finance mechanisms.
2. Africa must no longer be used as a dumping ground for agricultural products that compete with local production and destroy local economies.
3. Africa must not be opened for contamination by GMOs through food aid and/or agrofuels.
4. Africans must reclaim sovereignty over their agriculture and truncate attempts by agribusiness to turn the so-called food crisis into money-making opportunities through price fixing, hoarding and other unfair trade practices.
5. We reject the promotion of conversion of swaths of African land into monoculture plantations and farms for agrofuels production on the guise that some of such lands are marginal lands. We note that the concept of marginal lands is a cloak for further marginalizing the poor in Africa through their being dispossessed and dislocated from their territories.
6. Africa has been subsidizing world development for a long time and this has to change and African resources must be used for African development to the benefit of local communities.

FoE Africa calls on all communities of Africa to mobilize, resist and change unwholesome practices that entrench servitude and exploitation on our continent.

Signed:

FOE Ghana; FOE Togo; FOE Nigeria; FOE Cameroon; FOE Sierra Leone; FOE Tunisia; FOE Swaziland; FOE South Africa; FOE Mauritius