

The Gates Foundation the 'Green Revolution' in Africa

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Poor-Washing, the Gates Foundation & the "Green Revolution" in Africa by BAR managing Editor Bruce Dixon

Genetically altered crops will rescue Africa from endemic shortfalls in food production, claim corporate foundations that have announced a \$150 million "gift" to spark a "Green Revolution" in agriculture on the continent. Of course, U.S.-based agribusiness holds the patents to these wondercrops, and can exercise their proprietary "rights" at will. Are corporate foundations really out to feed the hungry, or are they hypocritical Trojan Horses on a mission to hijack the world's food supply - to create the most complete and ultimate state of dependency.

"Poor-washing" is the common public relations tactic of concealing bitterly unfair and predatory trade policies that create and deepen hunger and poverty with clouds of hypocritical noise about feeding the hungry and alleviating poverty. It's hard to imagine a better case of media poor-washing than the hype around the recently announced \$150 million "gifts" of the Gates and Rockefeller Foundations to the cause of reforming African agriculture, feeding that continent's impoverished millions and sparking an African "Green Revolution"

For ADM, Cargill, Monsanto and other agribusiness giants farming as humans have practiced it the last ten thousand years is a [big problem](#). The problem is that when farmers plant and harvest crops, setting a little aside for next year's seed, people eat, but corporations don't get paid. That problem has been so thoroughly solved in US food production that chemical fertilizers and pesticides create a biological dead zone of hundreds of square miles in the Gulf of Mexico where the Mississippi, draining much of the continent's richest farmland, empties into it. U.S. law requires the registration all crop varieties, and makes it extraordinarily difficult for farmers to save and plant their own seed year to year without paying royalties to corporations who "own" the genetic code of those crops.

But until recently in the developing world, farmers still planted, plowed and harvested without paying American agribusiness anything. The first attempt to "monetize" food production took place a generation ago in Southeast Asia and India. Called the "Green Revolution" its public face was a masterpiece of pious poor-washing. A thin layer of native academic, "experts" and local officials were bought off, and slick ad campaigns were told local farmers the road to prosperity was the use of vast quantities of pesticides, herbicides, and high-yield crops grown for international markets instead of feeding local populations.

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The "Green Revolution" in India worked out well for the middlemen who sold the chemicals and lent poor farmers money to buy them, and for its wealthiest farmers. But when millions of farmers, on the advice foreign and domestic "experts" produced cotton, sugar and export crops for the world market instead of food to feed their neighbors, several nasty things happened. The prices for those export staples went down, so poor farmers wound up without the cash to repay loans for the year's seed and chemicals. Food which used to be abundant and locally grown became scarce, expensive and had to come from other regions or overseas. The chemicals killed many beneficial plants and insects, and promoted the emergence of newer, tougher pests and diseases. Export crops needed more water than traditional ones, so wealthy farmers monopolized what water there was to feed their export crops. Man-made famines occurred. People starved or became dependent on imported foreign grain. Millions of farmers were forced to sell their land (or sometimes their children) to pay off their debts, and move to the cities.

In the tradition of the European explorers unleashed on the rest of humanity with letters from their kings entitling them to claim and seize the lands, treasure and inhabitants of all places not under the rule of white Christian princes, the US patent office began in the 1990s, granting American corporations exclusive "patents" for varieties of rice produced in Asia for thousands of years, for beans grown in Mexico centuries before Columbus, and for all the products which were or might be made from trees, plants, roots and molds growing in the rain forests of Africa and Asia. Indian courts, under pressure from their citizens, rebuffed for now American attempts to collect royalties for the production of basmati rice, which farmers in India and Pakistan have cultivated for centuries. But every developing country can't bring to the table against the U.S. the power that India, with a fifth of the world's population can.

In the US media this privatization of nature is called "the biotech industry". Most of humanity outside the U.S. call it [biopiracy](#). In the last decade, corporate "life scientists" in the biotech industry have invented, and the US Department of Agriculture has patented a perverse but profitable technology which prevents a current year's crop from producing usable seed for next year's planting. These "[terminator seeds](#)" will force farmers to return to corporate seed suppliers every year.

For the last 20 years, the US has, with varying degrees of success, bullied, bribed and threatened governments on six continents to enforce its skull-and-crossbones patent laws through bilateral trade agreements --- think NAFTA and CAFTA - through World Bank and International Monetary Fund dictates, and the World Trade Organization. Today UN bodies and dozens of individual countries are under pressure to allow the introduction of genetically modified crops and terminator seed technologies into their food chains. Despite their poverty and need for development aid, African countries, informed by the world media (outside the US) have been forced by their own citizens, scientists and farmers to stoutly resist Western efforts to

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undermine their food security. But the slick and shiny PR campaign around the Gates and Rockefeller initiatives, supposedly addressed at alleviating world hunger seem to mark a new stage in the continuing scramble for African resources.

Last year, the Gates Foundation hired former Monsanto VP Robert Robert Horsch as senior program officer for Africa. Monsanto is the company that invented "biotechnology" and the patenting of life forms by corporations. This is the context for the "philanthropy" of the Gates and Rockefeller Foundations, and their expressed concern for foisting a "Green Revolution" upon Africa. Will African farmers and their governments be forced to pay American corporations to cultivate the crops they have for centuries? Global capital and competition to control the world's remaining energy have put Africa's oil resources in the sights of America's strategic planners. If the Gates and Rockefeller Foundations, along with Monsanto, Cargill, ADM and other agribusiness and biotech and "life science" players have anything to say about it, Africa's food supply is up for grabs too.