

Lies and Fabrications: The Propaganda Campaign in Support of Genetically Modified Crops (GMO)

So You Want to Help Africa Mr Paterson?

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Region: [Europe](#), [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

According to Mathew Holehouse in the UK's Telegraph newspaper ([here](#)), former UK Environment Minister Owen Paterson will this week accuse the European Union and Greenpeace of condemning people in the developing world to death by refusing to accept genetically modified crops. Speaking in Pretoria, South Africa, on Tuesday, Paterson will warn that a food revolution that could save Africa from hunger is being held back and that the world is on the cusp of a green revolution, of the kind that fed a billion people in the 1960s and 1970s as the world's population soared.

After talking about a growing global population and the pivotal role of GMOs in feeding it, Paterson will assert:

"This is also a time, however, of great mischief, in which many individuals and even governments are turning their backs on progress. Not since the original Luddites smashed cotton mill machinery in early 19th century England, have we seen such an organised, fanatical antagonism to progress and science. These enemies of the Green Revolution call themselves 'progressive', but their agenda could hardly be more backward-looking and regressive... their policies would condemn billions to hunger, poverty and underdevelopment. And their insistence on mandating primitive, inefficient farming techniques would decimate the earth's remaining wild spaces, devastate species and biodiversity, and leave our natural ecology poorer as a result."

Instead of parroting the corporate spin of the pro-GMO lobby, Paterson would do better to consider more viable options that he likes to denigrate as 'backward-looking and regressive' by listening to what Russia's Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev stated in April of last year:

"We don't have a goal of developing GM products here or to import them. We can feed ourselves with normal, common, not genetically modified products. If the Americans like to eat such products, let them eat them. We don't need to do that; we have enough space and opportunities to produce organic food." (see [here](#))

Or maybe Paterson would benefit from heeding a Statement signed by 24 delegates from 18 African countries to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization in 1998:

"We strongly object that the image of the poor and hungry from our countries

is being used by giant multinational corporations to push a technology that is neither safe, environmentally friendly nor economically beneficial to us. We do not believe that such companies or gene technologies will help our farmers to produce the food that is needed in the 21st century. On the contrary, we think it will destroy the diversity, the local knowledge and the sustainable agricultural systems that our farmers have developed for millennia, and that it will thus undermine our capacity to feed ourselves.”

Perhaps he should also listen to Viva Kermani ([here](#) – supported by data) when talking about the situation in India:

“... the statements that they [supporters of GMOs] use such as “thousands die of hunger daily in India” are irresponsible and baseless scare-mongering with a view to projecting GM as the only answer. When our people go hungry, or suffer from malnutrition, it is not for lack of food, it is because their right to safe and nutritious food that is culturally connected has been blocked. That is why it is not a technological fix problem and GM has no place in it.”

Paterson has a history of engaging in the type of emotional blackmail and smearing of critics that comes second nature to the pro-GMO lobby. Anyone (usually portrayed as affluent Westerners – which is not true, given many of the critics are not ‘Western’, affluent or reside in ‘developed’ countries) who opposes GM crops or food is painted as an enemy of the poor because they take food from their bellies (see [this](#)). Paterson is using a rhetorical device deliberately designed to mislead and stir up emotion. His tactics are based on spurious claims about the efficacy of GMO technology and are intended to divert attention away from the true nature and causes of hunger and food poverty.

Proponents of GM crops constantly claim that we need such technology to address hunger and to feed a growing global population. We are told by the GMO biotech lobby that GM crops are essential, are better for the environment and will provide the tools that farmers need in a time of climate chaos. They claim that GM crops provide higher yields and higher incomes for farmers around the world. All such claims have been shown to be bogus.

For example, let us take one report from the many that could be cited to show the fallacious nature of these claims. The Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN) last year released a report that concluded hunger is caused by poverty and inequality and that we already produce enough food to feed the world’s population and did so even at the peak of the world food crisis in 2008. The report went on to say that current global food production provides enough to feed ten billion people and the recent food price crises of 2008 and 2011 both took place in years of record global harvests, clearly showing that these crises were not the result of scarcity.

CBAN also noted that the GM crops that are on the market today are not designed to address hunger. Four GM crops account for almost 100 percent of worldwide GM crop acreage, and all four have been developed for large-scale industrial farming systems and are used as cash crops for export, to produce fuel or for processed food and animal feed.

The report also stated that GM crops have not increased yields and do not increase farmers’ incomes. GM crops lead to an increase in pesticide use and cause further harm to the environment. Pesticide reduction was the primary selling point for Bt cotton adoption in India, but overall pesticide use has not decreased in any state that grows Bt cotton, with

the exception of Andhra Pradesh. Read the [full report](#) that contains over 100 references in support of these claims.

Hunger, food security and 'feeding the world' is a political, social and economic problem and no amount of gene splicing is capable of surmounting obstacles like poor roads, inadequate rural credit systems and insufficient irrigation.

Paterson's talk about backward, regressive, primitive farming practices that would condemn millions to hunger and decimate the ecology is again playing on fear and emotion. What he says has no basis in reality.

Numerous official reports have argued that to feed the hungry in poorer regions we need to support diverse, sustainable agro-ecological methods of farming and strengthen local food economies: for example, see [this](#) UN report, [this](#) official report, [this](#) report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food and [this](#) report by 400 experts which was twice peer reviewed.

See also see [this](#) report that indicates GMOs are not necessary to feed the world.

So from where and from who is Paterson getting his information from? I think we know the answer.

It is after all small farms and peasant farmers (more often than not serving local communities) that are more productive than giant industrial (export-oriented) farms and which produce most of the world's food (see [this](#) report from GRAIN). The experience with GM crops shows that the application of GM technology is more likely to actually undermine food security and entrench the social, economic and environmental problems created by industrial agriculture and corporate control (see [this](#) other report from GRAIN and [this](#) article by Helena Paul documenting ecocide and genocide in South America due to the imposition of GM crops there).

"The problem is that the poor have no money to buy food and increasingly, no access to land on which to grow it... GM is a dangerous distraction from real solutions and claims that GM can help feed the world can be viewed as exploitation of the suffering of the hungry. GM crops do not increase yield. Nor are there any GM crops that are better than non-GM crops at tolerating poor soils or challenging climate conditions. Thus it is difficult to see how GM can contribute to solving world hunger... The two major GM crops, soy and maize, mostly go into animal feed for intensive livestock operations, biofuels to power cars, and processed human food - products for wealthy nations that have nothing to do with meeting the basic food needs of the poor and hungry."

This above quote is from the Open Earth Source report [GMOs Myths and Truths](#). The report provides specific details about GM crops that have been specifically promoted as helping small-scale and poor farmers in Africa. However, the results were the opposite of what was promised and all these projects failed.

Owen Paterson is a staunch supporter of GM technology, so staunch in fact that fellow Conservative Party MP Zac Goldsmith stated Paterson was little more than an industry puppet (see [this](#) in the UK's Independent newspaper that quotes Goldsmith).

Paterson is ignorant of or at least content to side line the devastating, deleterious health,

environmental, social and economic impacts of GMOs, which are outlined in the 'GMO Myths and Truths' report. He acts as a mouthpiece for the GMO biotech sector and has made numerous false claims about the benefits and safety of GMOs that fly in the face of research findings.

In the recent past, he was keen to reassure the British public that safety concerns over GMOs are based on "humbug" and that GM food is completely safe to eat. See [this](#) article, which outlines Paterson's stance and critiques his claims.

When Paterson talks about 'enemies' of the 'green revolution' as being fanatical Luddites, he may also like to consider that the 'green revolution' was not the resounding success he likes to portray it as. Raj Patel provides some revealing insight into how the 'green revolution' took credit for many gains in Indian agriculture that were due to other influences (see [this](#)). And, of course, the 'green revolution' was based on, among other things, massive external inputs, violence, severe environmental and human health degradation and debt (see [this](#) - the entire text of Vandana Shiva's book 'The Violence of the Green Revolution' - and [this](#) and [this](#), which both highlight the current agrarian crisis in Punjab, the original 'poster boy' of the 'green revolution').

It comes as no surprise that Paterson would state the things he does. As Environment Minister, his support for GMOs was being carried out in partnership with a number of pro-GMO institutions, including the Agricultural Biotechnology Council (ABC), which is backed by GM companies such as Monsanto, Syngenta and Bayer CropScience. Last year, despite government attempts to throw a veil of secrecy over meetings and conversations it had with the industry, GeneWatch UK uncovered evidence that GMO companies are driving UK government policy in this area (see [here](#)).

So if you were still wondering from where and whom Paterson is getting his information from, it should by now be clear.

His attacks on Greenpeace and others who advocate a shift away from petrochemical/GM agriculture towards sustainable farming are part of the wider media campaign to demonize scientists and prominent anti-GMO campaigners. A number of hatchet pieces have in recent months branded Vandana Shiva a liar and a charlatan and the GMO lobby has assembled all the ingredients (not least a massive amount of money) of a classic yet predictable propaganda campaign (see [this](#) and [this](#)). From the UK, to Ghana (see [this](#)) and India (see [this](#)), there is a concerted campaign by the GMO lobby and its political handmaidens to demonize critics of GMOs.

Paterson plays his role well.

Such tactics are used because the pro-GMO lobby has a big problem. It cannot provide a convincing case for GMOs. It therefore resorts to populism, intimidation, character assassination, emotional blackmail, falsehoods, panic mongering and unfounded claims (see [this](#) to see how its rhetoric about 'sound science' and dispassionate reason informing the debate on GMOs contradicts how it acts in reality). In fact, it goes above and beyond such things by tightening its grip on countries on the back of coups, war and conflict (see [this](#) to understand how big agritech concerns benefit from and fuel the situation in Ukraine).

Yes, it is a time of great mischief as Paterson says - but not because of what his critics say

or do – but because of what he and his backers do by turning their backs on the type of sound science and progress in the way that he falsely he accuses GMO critics of doing.

Paterson belongs to the pro-big business Conservative Party which champions the type of privatisation, public expenditure reduction, deregulation, tax avoiding and ‘free’ trade policies that have ceded policy decision making to powerful corporate players. This has in turn led to a concentration of wealth (see [this](#)) and imposed ‘austerity’ and drives hunger, poverty, land grabs and the disappearance of family/peasant farms (see [this](#) analysis of food commodity speculation, [this](#) description of the global food system and [this](#) report by the Oakland Institute on land grabs) – the very bedrock of global food production (see [this](#)).

What Paterson and the agritech cartel offer is more of the same by tearing up traditional agriculture for the benefit of corporate entities. Paterson talks of critics of GMO as being Luddites, fanatics and condemning billions (yes, he does say billions!) to poverty and underdevelopment with regressive policies. He should look closer to home.

He should realise that elite interests in the West have condemned tens of millions to hunger and poverty in Africa by enslaving them and their nations to debt and that agriculture has for many decades been an important means by which US foreign policy creates dependence and subservience (see [here](#)). But such things are not to be debates by Paterson. Like all good (or should that be bad?) politicians, he twists the truth and turns deception and hypocrisy into an art.

The current global system of chemical-industrial agriculture and World Trade Organisation rules that agritech companies helped draw up for their benefit to force their products into countries (see [here](#)) are a major cause of structural hunger, poverty, illness and environmental destruction. By its very design, the system is meant to suck the life from people, nations and the planet for profit and control (see [here](#)). Blaming critics of this system for the problems of the system is highly convenient. And forwarding some bogus technical quick-fix will not put things right. It represents more of the same.

So you want to ‘help’ Africa Mr Paterson?

Daniel Maingi works with small farmers in Kenya and belongs to the organization Growth Partners for Africa. Maingi was born on a farm in eastern Kenya and studied agriculture from a young age. He remembers a time when his family would grow and eat a diversity of crops, such as mung beans, green grams, pigeon peas, and a variety of fruits now considered ‘wild’. Following the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s and 1990s and a green revolution meant to boost agricultural efficiency, the foods of his childhood have been replaced with maize, maize, and more maize. He says:

“In the morning, you make porridge from maize and send the kids to school. For lunch, boiled maize and a few green beans. In the evening, ugali, [a staple dough-like maize dish, served with meat]... [today] it’s a monoculture diet, being driven by the food system – it’s an injustice.” (see [here](#) and [here](#) for the sources that quote Maingi and other commentators mentioned below).

As much of Africa is so dry, it’s not suited for thirsty crops, and heavy use of fertilizer kills worms and microbes important for soil health. Maingi therefore argues that the model of farming in the West is not appropriate for farming in most of Africa and that the West should invest in indigenous knowledge and agro-ecology.

Growth Partners Africa works with farmers to enrich the soil with manure and other organic material, to use less water and to grow a variety of crops, including some that would be considered weeds on an industrial farm. For Maingi, food sovereignty in Africa means reverting to a way of farming and eating that pre-dates major investment from the West.

Mariam Mayet of the African Centre for Biosafety in South Africa says that many countries are subsidizing farmers to buy fertilizer as part of the chemical-industrial model of agriculture, but that takes money away from public crop-breeding programmes that provide improved seeds to farmers at low cost:

“It’s a system designed to benefit agribusinesses and not small-scale farmers.”

She adds because so many institutions, from African governments to the World Bank, have ‘embraced’ the ‘green revolution’ so much that alternative farming methods are getting short shrift.

Elizabeth Mpofu, of La Via Campesina, grows a variety of crops in Zimbabwe. During a recent drought, neighbours who relied on chemical fertilizer lost most of their crops. She reaped a bounty of sorghum, corn, and millet using what are called agro-ecological methods: natural pest control, organic fertilizer, and locally adapted crops.

There is also concern about the increased reliance on expensive inputs and the dramatic drop in price of crops. This has resulted in poverty for the small farmer.

Daniel Maingi:

“What the World Bank has done, the International Monetary fund, what AGRA and Bill Gates are doing, it’s actually pretty wrong. The farmer himself should not be starving”.

He added that what the Gates Foundation/big agritech backed Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) (see [this](#)) is doing is “out of sync with the natural process” by bringing in imported seeds, which are not adapted to the land and require excessive fertilizer and pesticides.

In effect, giant agritech corporations with their patented GMO seeds and associated chemical inputs are working to ensure a shift away from diversified agriculture that guarantees balanced local food production, the protection of people’s livelihoods and environmental sustainability. The evidence provided by GRAIN and the Oakland Institute shows that small farmers are being displaced and are struggling to preserve their indigenous seeds and traditional knowledge of farming systems.

Globally, agritech corporations are being allowed to shape government policy by being granted a strategic role in trade negotiations (see [this](#)). They are increasingly setting the policy/knowledge framework by being allowed to fund and determine the nature of research carried out in public universities and institutes (see [this](#)). They continue to propagate the myth that they have the answer to global hunger and poverty.

“... take capitalism and business out of farming in Africa. The West should

invest in indigenous knowledge and agro-ecology, education and infrastructure and stand in solidarity with the food sovereignty movement.” Daniel Maingi, Growth Partners for Africa.

Paterson and his corporate associates believe that the poor must be ‘helped’ by the West and its powerful corporations and billionaire ‘philanthropists’. It harks back to colonialism. The West has already done enough damage in Africa as Michel Chossudovsky has described:

“The “economic therapy” imposed under IMF-World Bank jurisdiction is in large part responsible for triggering famine and social devastation in Ethiopia and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, wrecking the peasant economy and impoverishing millions of people. With the complicity of branches of the US government, it has also opened the door for the appropriation of traditional seeds and landraces by US biotech corporations, which behind the scenes have been peddling the adoption of their own genetically modified seeds under the guise of emergency aid and famine relief. Moreover, under WTO rules, the agri-biotech conglomerates can manipulate market forces to their advantage as well as exact royalties from farmers. The WTO provides legitimacy to the food giants to dismantle State programmes including emergency grain stocks, seed banks, extension services and agricultural credit, etc.), plunder peasant economies and trigger the outbreak of periodic famines.” See the full article (‘Sowing the Seeds of Famine in Ethiopia’) from which this extract is taken [here](#).

When Owen Paterson accuses critics of GMOs of being elitist and regressive, he is merely attempting to shift the focus from his own own elitist, regressive ideology.

Hasn’t the world had enough of the type of Western ‘humanitarianism’ that Paterson espouses?

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