

Monsanto in India: Meet the New Boss - Same as the Old Boss?

By [Colin Todhunter](#)

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In capitalism, the state's primary role is to secure the interests of private capital. The institutions of globalised capitalism – from the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO right down to the compliant bureaucracies of national states or supranational unions – facilitate private wealth accumulation that results in the forms of structural inequalities and violence (unemployment, poverty, population displacement, bad food, poor health, environmental destruction, etc) that have become 'accepted' as necessary (for 'growth') and taken for granted within mainstream media and political narratives.

When referring to Western countries, those narratives like to use the euphemism 'austerity' for deregulation, privatisation and gross inequalities and hardship, while hiding being the mantra 'there is no alternative'. When referring to India, they use the euphemism 'assisting development' for corporate imperialism, while hiding behind the term 'investing in'.

Each year, in August, India commemorates the anniversary of independence from Britain. In the 1990s, however, the IMF and World Bank wanted India to shift hundreds of millions out of agriculture. In return for up to [£90 billion in loans](#), India was instructed to dismantle its state-owned seed supply system, reduce subsidies and run down public agriculture institutions and offer incentives for the growing of cash crops to earn foreign exchange.

According to the World Bank's lending report, India has easily been the [largest recipient](#) of its loans in the history of the institution, and these conditions form part of the broader World Bank-backed development plan for India that involves the mass displacement of people in order to restructure India for the benefit of powerful corporations.

When a creditor demands changes are made to an economy in this way – changes that will ultimately radically alter the social fabric of a country – it leads many to question just how much 'independence' remains.

In June, the [National Alliance of People's Movements stated](#) that the real impacts of this "dangerous financial institution" – the World Bank – works only to increase the profitability of its "shareholders" and further the cause of powerful capital.

Hostage to neoliberal capitalism

Hundreds of thousands of farmers in India have taken their lives since 1997 and many more are experiencing economic distress or have left farming [as a result of](#) debt, a shift to (GM) cash crops and economic liberalisation. Facilitated by the WTO and the US-India Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture, there is a deliberate strategy to make agriculture financially non-viable for India's small farms, to get most farmers out of farming and to impose the World

Bank sanctioned model of agriculture. The aim is to replace current structures with a system of industrial (GM) agriculture suited to the needs of Western agribusiness, food processing and retail concerns.

If you want to see the kinds of eventual impact this could have, look no further than what has happened in Mexico on the back of NAFTA, in terms of rising [food insecurity, bad health and poisoned agriculture](#) (not to mention a devastated economy with former workers driven into [the arms of drug cartels](#) to make a living).

The opening up of India to foreign capital is supported by rhetoric about increasing agricultural efficiency, creating jobs and boosting GDP growth. This jargon is used to try to convince the public that an increasing concentration of wealth in the hands of a relative few – via, for instance, deregulations, privatisations and lower labour and environmental protection standards – is for their own benefit because it is good for ‘growth’.

We can already see the outcome of these policies across the world: the increasing power of unaccountable financial institutions, record profits and massive increases in wealth for elite interests and, for the rest, disempowerment, mass surveillance, austerity, job losses, the erosion of rights, weak unions, cuts to public services, environmental degradation, spiraling national debt and opaque, corrupt trade deals, such as TTIP, CETA, [RCEP](#) (affecting India) and TPA.

PM Modi recently stated that India is now one of the most business friendly countries in the world. The code for being ‘business friendly’ translates into a willingness by the government to facilitate much of the above, while reducing taxes and tariffs and allowing the acquisition of public assets via privatisation as well as instituting policy frameworks that work to the advantage of foreign corporations.

When the World Bank rates countries on their level of ‘Ease of Doing Business’, it means national states facilitating policies that force working people to take part in a race to the bottom based on free market fundamentalism. The more ‘compliant’ national governments make their populations and regulations, the more ‘business friendly’ a country is.

In the realm of agriculture, the World Bank’s [‘Enabling the Business of Agriculture’](#) entails opening up markets to Western agribusiness and their fertilisers, pesticides, weedicides and patented seeds.

Rather than improve poor management, inept bureaucracies and deficiencies in food logistics, the mantra is to let ‘the market’ intervene: a euphemism for letting powerful corporations take control; the very transnational corporations that receive massive taxpayer subsidies, manipulate markets, write trade agreements and institute a regime of intellectual property rights thereby indicating that the ‘free’ market only exists in the warped delusions of those who churn out clichés about letting the market decide.

According to the neoliberal ideologues, foreign investment is good for jobs and good for business. But just how many actually get created is another matter, as is the amount of jobs destroyed in the first place to pave the way for the entry of foreign corporations.

For example, Cargill sets up a food or seed processing plant that employs a few hundred people, but what about the [agricultural jobs](#) that were deliberately eradicated in the first place or the [village-level processors](#) who were cynically put out of business so Cargill could

gain a financially lucrative foothold?

The process resembles what Michel Chossudovsky notes in his 1997 book about the 'structural adjustment' of African countries. In 'The Globalization of Poverty', he says that economies are:

"opened up through the concurrent displacement of a pre-existing productive system. Small and medium-sized enterprises are pushed into bankruptcy or obliged to produce for a global distributor, state enterprises are privatised or closed down, independent agricultural producers are impoverished." (p.16)

If people are inclined to think farmers would be better off as foreign firms enter the supply chain, we need only [look at the plight](#) of farmers in India who were tied into contracts with Pepsico. Farmers were pushed into debt, reliance on one company and were paid a pittance

India is looking to US corporations to 'develop' its food and agriculture sector with foreign investment in retail, cold storage and various other infrastructure. Looking at what this could mean for India, food policy analyst Devinder Sharma [describes](#) how the industrialised US system of food and agriculture relies on massive taxpayer subsidies and has destroyed many farmers' livelihoods.

The fact that US agriculture now employs a tiny fraction of the population serves as a stark reminder for what is in store for Indian farmers. Sharma notes that agribusiness companies (whose business model in the US is based on [overproduction and taxpayer subsidies](#)) rake in huge profits, while depressed farmer incomes, poverty and higher retail prices become the norm.

The long-term plan is for an overwhelmingly urbanised India with a fraction of the population left in farming working on contracts for large suppliers and Wal-Mart-type supermarkets that offer a largely monoculture diet of highly processed, denutritified, genetically altered food based on crops soaked with chemicals and grown in increasingly degraded soils according to an unsustainable model of agriculture that is less climate/drought resistant, less diverse and unable to achieve food security (Bhaskar Save's [analysis](#) of what the Green Revolution did for India makes for interesting reading).

The [alternative](#) would be to protect indigenous agriculture from rigged global trade and trade deals and [corrupt markets](#) and to implement a shift to sustainable, localised agriculture which grows a diverse range of crops and offers a healthy diet to the public (alongside appropriate price and/or income [support](#) and [infrastructure](#)).

Instead, we see the push for bogus 'solutions' like GMOs and an adherence to neoliberal ideology that ultimately privileges profit and control of the food supply by powerful private interests, which have no concern whatsoever for the health of the public: for example, see [this new report](#) on how the food lobby destroys health in the EU and [this](#) on how taxes in the US ultimately promote obesity and disease by supporting the health damaging practices of the food industry.

Is this what Indians want to see happen in India to their food and health?

Unfortunately, the process is already well on track as 'Western diseases' take hold in the country's urban centres (see '[India: Obesity, Malnutrition and the Globalisation of Bad](#)

[Food'](#)).

[Devinder Sharma](#) has highlighted where Indian policy makers' priorities lie:

“Agriculture has been systematically killed over the last few decades... 60 percent of the population lives in the villages or in the rural areas and is involved in agriculture, and less than two percent of the annual budget goes to agriculture... When you are not investing in agriculture... You are not wanting it to perform...”

Support given to agriculture is portrayed as a drain on the economy and is reduced and farmers suffer yet it still manages to deliver bumper harvests year after year. On the other hand, corporate-industrial India has failed to deliver in terms of boosting exports or creating jobs, despite the hand outs and tax exemptions given to it [see [this](#) and [this](#)].

The number of jobs created in India between 2005 and 2010 was 2.7 million (the years of high GDP growth). According to [International Business Times](#), 15 million enter the workforce every year. And data released by the Labour Bureau shows that in 2015, [jobless 'growth'](#) had finally arrived in India.

So where are the jobs going to come from to cater for hundreds of millions of agricultural workers who are to be displaced from the land or those whose livelihoods will be destroyed as transnational corporations move in and seek to capitalise small-scale village-level industries that currently employ tens of millions?

Monsanto in India

Thanks to its political influence, Monsanto already dominates the cotton industry in India with its GMOs. It is increasingly shaping agri-policy and the knowledge paradigm by funding agricultural research in public universities and institutes. Its practices and colonisation of institutions have led to it being called the '[contemporary East India Company](#)', and regulatory bodies are now severely [compromised and riddled with conflicts of interest](#) where decision-making over GMOs are concerned.

However, Monsanto's enterprise in India is corrupt. [Vandana Shiva](#) has described how on a global level the company has succeeded in imposing the false idea of 'manufacturing' and 'inventing' seeds in order to slap patents on them (in India's case, 'royalties'). Monsanto's collection of royalties as 'trait value' or as a 'fee for technology traits' is an intellectual property rights category that does not exist in any legal framework. It was concocted by Monsanto lawyers to work outside of the laws of the land and is thus illegal. Shiva also notes that the introduction of GMOs without approvals, and thus Monsanto's original entry into India, was a violation and subversion of India's biosafety regulations.

In India, the Biological Diversity Act 2002 grants explicit rights to farmers over ownership of plant varieties. Even if a breeder holds a right (patent) to a variety, they cannot prevent the farmer from producing or saving the seed. It acknowledges that a breeder does not create a seed from thin air. Seeds are not 'invented' but have been developed by farmers over many generations. However, this does not fit the corporate business model of companies like Monsanto, where farmers are to be consumers who purchase corporate owned and controlled products (seeds and chemicals).

While Monsanto works on or around that particular obstacle, it is also hard at work with its propaganda campaign to convince us all that GM food is necessary to feed the world's burgeoning population. Its claims are always hidden behind a flimsy and cynical veil of humanitarian intent (helping the poor and hungry), which is [easily torn away](#) to expose the self-interest that lies beneath. The world (including India) does not need GM to feed itself. GM and these humanitarian sentiments are little more than a Trojan horse aimed at securing greater control of food and agriculture.

Various high-level official reports (listed in [this](#) piece) in India have advised against adopting GM food crops, and, in addition to numerous other bodies and sources (many of which are documented [here](#)), the [International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge and Science for Development Report](#) stated that smallholder, traditional farming (not GMOs) can deliver food security in low-income countries through sustainable agri-ecological systems. The roots of hunger and food poverty are political and are related to an increasingly globalised and [exploitative system](#) of industrialised agriculture and food production. The companies behind the GM project are part of that system: they [fuel it and profit from it](#). Patents, royalties and GMOs ensure more profit and greater control over food and agriculture.

Agriculture and the projection of US power

In his book '[Seeds of Destruction: The Hidden Agenda of Genetic Manipulation](#)', William F Engdahl describes how the oil-rich Rockefeller family set out to control and profit from global agriculture via the Green Revolution. Along with other players (eg Cargill), Rockefeller interests set out to destroy family farms in the US and the indigenous agriculture and food security of other countries. This hegemonic strategy was actively supported by their proxies in the US government and facilitated globally through 'free' trade agreements, the IMF, World Bank and WTO.

GMOs represent the ultimate stranglehold of US interests over global food via 'terminator' seed technology, seed patenting and intellectual property rights.

The [political backing](#) for GMOs by the US State Department, the strategic position of the US GM biotech sector in international trade agreements (from TTIP to the US-India Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture) and at the WTO and the push to get GMOs into India does not bode well.

Given the history of the US in using agriculture as a tool to leverage global influence, in India on 15 August, we would do well to remember that patriotic sentiments have always been used by the powerful to help disguise the true nature of power.

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Articles by: [Colin Todhunter](#)

About the author:

Colin Todhunter is an extensively published independent writer and former social policy researcher. Originally from the UK, he has spent many years in India. His website is www.colintodhunter.com
https://twitter.com/colin_todhunter

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