

Who Needs Gates and Monsanto? Confronting Hunger, Poverty and Climate Change: “Tremendous Success” of Agroecology in Africa

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It is essential that we [get off the chemical treadmill](#) that the modern industrial urban-centric food and agriculture system is based on. It is essential in terms of our health, the environment and sustainability and not least in terms of food security and supporting rural economies and smallholder farmers, who comprise the backbone of global food production.

Nevertheless, promoters of chemical-intensive agriculture and GMOs are fond of telling us all that traditional approaches to agriculture will not be able to produce enough food to feed the world. For example, the former UK environment minister flew to South Africa earlier this year to praise the apparent success of the ‘green revolution’ and to promote the supposed wonders of genetically modified (GM) crops. Paterson warned that a food revolution that could save Africa from hunger is being held back.

He rounded on opponents of GMOs and chemical-intensive agriculture by stating:

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.

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. By seeking to denigrate traditional forms of agriculture, however, Paterson is attempting to close off these in favour of promoting external input intensive ‘solutions’ and proprietary technologies, such as GMOs, on behalf of global agribusiness corporations.

Some months ago, in defence of Owen Paterson’s claims, Professor Tony Trewavas of Edinburgh University, who specialises in plant physiology and molecular biology, stated in an open letter to me:

If agroecological approaches can currently match yield that can be attained by using modern farming methods then by all means use it. But if not and my understanding is that currently it cannot, then they should not be the farming method of recommended choice at present... When Africa has got its population increases under control and producing sufficient to feed everybody then alternatives like agroecology may come to the fore. No-one with any concern for humanity or the welfare of its population should currently consider any other alternative. The groups that campaign for this kind or that kind of farming method and destroy crops to try and bounce others into their point of view have lost that fundamental concern for their own species.

The claims and assertions of Paterson and Trewavas are wrong on many levels, as I have described in previous articles (see [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#)). Smears, rhetoric and emotional blackmail are no substitute for rational debate. They are no excuse for ignoring reality either.

[New research by the Oakland Institute](#) shows the actual reality. It has released a report on 33 case studies that shed light on the success of agroecological agriculture across the African continent in the face of climate change, hunger and poverty.

Agroecology combines sound ecological management, including minimising the use of toxic inputs by using on-farm renewable resources and privileging endogenous solutions to manage pests and disease, with an approach that upholds and secures farmers' livelihoods.

Anuradha Mittal, Executive Director of the Oakland Institute, says:

Released just two weeks ahead of the COP21 Conference in Paris, these case studies provide irrefutable facts and figures on how agricultural transformation – respectful of the farmers and the environment – can yield immense economic, social, and food security benefits while ensuring climate justice and restoring soils and the environment.

Owen Paterson says that Africa needs a new green revolution, more synthetic fertilizers and genetically modified crops, and the Gates Foundation as well as big agribusiness concerns such as Monsanto are pushing hard for this.

In response, Frederic Mousseau, Policy Director of the Oakland Institute, who coordinated the Oakland Institute research, states:

These case studies debunk these myths and highlight the multiple benefits of agroecology, including affordable and sustainable ways to boost agricultural yields while increasing farmers' incomes, food security and resilience.

The research highlights the wide variety of techniques and practices used to achieve these benefits, including plant diversification, intercropping, the application of mulch, manure or compost for soil fertility, the natural management of pests and diseases, agroforestry and the construction of water management structures.

The case studies show that agroecology is not a one-size-fits-all set of practices. Rather, techniques are adapted to meet specific needs and ecosystems. Indeed, farmers who practice agroecology are innovators and experiment to find the best solutions for

themselves.

It is worth noting that agriculture, forestry, and other land use are responsible for nearly a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions from human activity. The International Panel on Climate Change noted that emissions from these sectors have almost doubled over the past 50 years and could increase by an additional 30 percent by 2050. The use of synthetic fertilizers is the fastest growing source of agriculture GHG emissions, having increased 37 percent since 2001.

Ibrahima Coulibaly, President of CNOP-Mali and Vice President of the ROPPA (Network of Farmers' and Agricultural Producers' Organisations of West Africa), says:

Our governments must now take decisive steps to actually support agroecological practices instead of promoting industrial food production systems that are contributing to climate change while making farmers poorer and more vulnerable to market fluctuations and weather hazards. We need our governments to ensure our children a future in which they can feed themselves with nutritious food in a healthy environment.

Since 2006, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has funded the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) to the tune of almost \$420 million. This strategy for agriculture in Africa is a flawed attempt to impose corporate-controlled industrial agriculture at the expense of more ecologically sound approaches.

AGRA is part of a global trend that is being driven by big agribusiness corporations that seeks to eradicate the small farmer and subject countries to the vagaries of rigged global markets (see [this](#) and [this](#)). Smallholder farmers are being displaced across the world and are struggling to preserve their indigenous seeds and traditional knowledge of farming systems. Agritech corporations are being allowed to shape government policy by being granted a [strategic role](#) in trade negotiations. 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. And they continue to propagate the myth that they have the answer to global hunger and poverty, despite evidence that they do not (see [this](#) and [this](#)).

The Gates Foundation, Monsanto and Western governments are placing African agriculture in the hands of big agribusiness for private profit and strategic control under [the pretext of helping the poor](#). And they are side-lining local farmers and organisation and using taxpayers' money to help do it (see [this](#)).

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](#) 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.

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).

What Paterson and the agritech cartel offer is more of the same by tearing up traditional agriculture for the benefit of corporate entities. 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 parasitical, sucking the life from people, nations and the planet for profit and control (see [here](#)).

Forwarding some bogus technical quick-fix will not put things right. It represents more of the same. The globalised industrial food and agriculture system is failing to feed the world and is driving some of the world's most pressing crises.

The success stories from Africa highlighted by the research discussed here indicate that agroecology puts farmers, including many women farmers, in charge their own future. Moreover, development is placed firmly in the hands of farmers themselves. However, while agroecology promotes low use of external inputs, it is a very knowledge-intensive system.

The Oakland Institute thus notes that transmission of this knowledge, adaptation to local contexts and appropriation by farmers and government technicians are essential for farmers and communities if they are to reap the benefits of agroecology. The case studies demonstrate how the expansion of agroecological practices can generate a rapid, fair and inclusive development that can be sustained for future generations. They also highlight just where investment should be going and where priorities should ultimately lie.

As I [have stated elsewhere](#), the environment, the quality of food and our health are being sacrificed for corporate profit. The type of agriculture being pushed by the likes of Paterson and his agribusiness backers represents [a form of looting](#) based on what we can loosely call 'capitalism'. The solution involves a shift towards agroecology and a reaffirmation of indigenous models of farming.

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