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THE RE-COLONISATION OF AFRICA

Jim Goodman has written an excellent article on the theme of African agriculture and self-reliance in food. Goodman observes that most of the world's food is grown by small scale farmers using a polyculture which provides a balanced diet, is affordable for local farmers and can accommodate changing local conditions.

The Green Revolution (GR) relied on increasing acreages of monocultures, increased use of herbicides, insecticides and fertilizers as well as new varieties of high yielding crops that small farmers were never able to afford. It was an unsustainable system calling for too many inputs, too much machinery and too much energy. Based on credit, this system created debts that could never be repaid. It did nothing to enable women, who grow a considerable portion of the world's food, to gain access to education and power, and even made it difficult for them to maintain their rights to land. Goodman underlines that the GR did not end hunger. It failed as well to meet Africa's expectations, because of the inaccessibility of water for irrigation, diverse soil types, lack of infrastructure and problems with governments, to name a few. While claiming to be a solution to feeding the hungry, it focused on permanent domination by Western governments, a new brand of colonialism.

Today, the interests of global agribusiness look to expand their profits with the financial backing of the World Bank, the International Monetary Funds, the United

States Agency for International Development (USAID), various 'charitable' foundations and the political backing of the G-8 'developed' countries. Africa is the target to be 'developed' for corporate profit and the control of Western governments.

This is especially true of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), started by the Bill and Melinda Gates and Rockefeller Foundations and fronted by African dignitaries. Their goals for Africa appear to be remarkably similar to those of the first Green Revolution: increasing agricultural production through increased inputs and monocultural farming with a focus on grain crops for the global market - with little in the way of societal change to empower small-scale farmers, women or the poor. Private seed companies will produce varieties and sell their 'improved' seed to farmers, rather than farmers having access to publicly developed seeds. This emphasis on private rather than public control is a new twist, leading to more corporate profit at the expense of farmers.

It is clear, although denied by AGRA, that the push is on to change seed laws in African countries and protect patented seeds. In Ghana, the national parliament has given full support to the Plant Breeders Bill, which would restrict seed saving and swapping. This Bill will require farmers to buy seeds every season. Farmers believe it will be difficult to find any seed other than genetically modified (GM) seed. Monsanto and other chemical companies consider

Africa to be their new frontier – lots of land, lots of people, lots of foreign investment money and governments willing to cooperate with their agenda.

AGRA has never consulted the African people. As Mariann Basse Orovwuje, leader of Nigerian Friends of the Earth, stated, ‘If you are helping me, ask me the kind of help I need.’ Mercia Andrews of the Trust for Community Outreach and Education in South Africa, called AGRA and the GR ‘another phase of colonialism’. Marian Mayet of the African Centre for

Biosafety stated that peasant farming systems have become reviled.

AGRA believes progress is large scale farming, monocultures, ‘improved’ GM seed (which AGRA calls ‘good seeds’) and an increased industrialised agricultural system, none of which have demonstrated any capacity to end world hunger.

Source: Jim Goodman, “The Re-Colonisation of Africa”. Summary by Mary Boyd
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SOME MORE FACTS ABOUT ‘PEASANT FARMING’

The world’s 3 billion or so indigenous and peasant producers – rural and urban, fishers and pastoralists – not only feed a majority of the world’s people and most of the world’s malnourished, but also create and conserve most of the world’s biodiversity and are humanity’s best defense against climate change.

Peasant and indigenous communities have been safeguarding, managing and contributing to the world’s seed supply for millennia. In the 1970s and 1980s, institutional plant breeders and scientists widely assumed that traditional crop varieties maintained by peasant communities would rapidly disappear in the wake of the Green Revolution and the introduction of commercial varieties. They were wrong. Today, despite a staggering level of corporate control over the world’s commercial seed supply, the vast majority of the farmers of the world – the peasant farmers who feed at least 70% of the world’s population – are not tied to the corporate seed chain. Peasant and indigenous seed systems continue to be vital in meeting the needs of farming communities. Farmers are actively creating, improving and exchanging their own varieties, including management, use and domestication of wild crop relatives. Though the situation varies by crop and region, 80% - 90% of the seed planted by

farmers in the global South comes from the so-called ‘informal sector’, that is, farm-saved seeds (including seed exchange with neighbouring farms and seed sales from local markets or seed fairs). Just 10% - 20% of seed requirements in developing countries is met by the ‘formal sector’, that is, seed companies, government seed sources or other institutions. Recent studies confirm what farming communities already know: the formal seed sector does not have the capacity to supply the diversity needed in sustainable farming systems or to meet the need for locally adapted varieties, especially in the face of climate change.

By contrast, the agro-industrial farming system has been spectacularly successful at encouraging uniformity, destroying diversity, polluting soil and water, corroding human health and impoverishing farm labour. This must change.

Source: Excerpted by Alison Healey from ETC Group Report, “Who will feed us? The industrial food chain or the peasant food web?” www.etcgroup.org ETC Group is an international organisation that monitors the impact of emerging technologies and corporate strategies on biodiversity, agriculture and human rights. ETC Group has offices in Canada; USA; Mexico; Ethiopia and the Philippines.

CANADA FACES AN ISDS TRIBUNAL AND LOSES

Canada just lost an ISDS¹ case under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed by Canada, USA and Mexico

Members of the USA-based Clayton family and a corporation they control, Bilcon, challenged Canadian environmental requirements affecting their plans to open a basalt quarry and a marine terminal in Nova Scotia. The family planned to extract and ship out large quantities of basalt from a 152-hectare project, located in a key breeding area for several endangered species, including the world's most endangered large whale. Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans determined that blasting activity in this sensitive area raised environmental concerns and thus required a rigorous assessment. The Clayton family argued that such an assessment was arbitrary, discriminatory and unfair, and thus a breach of obligations binding on signatories of NAFTA. The majority of the tribunal ruled against Canada's decision not to approve the basalt quarry and marine terminal. The investors seek \$300 million in compensation. A decision on the award amount has yet to be made.

One dissenting tribunalist called the ruling a 'significant intrusion into domestic jurisdiction'. He stated, 'Once again, a chill will be imposed on environmental review panels which will be concerned not to give too much weight to socio-economic considerations or considerations of the human environment in case the result is a claim for damages under NAFTA Chapter 11. In this respect, the tribunal's decision will be seen as a remarkable step backwards in environmental protection'.

Source: Ben Beachy, Research Director, Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch. Blog www.EyesOnTrade.org Edited A Healey.

¹ Investor-State Dispute Settlement. This is a procedure included in several so-called 'free trade' agreements which allows foreign corporate investors to sue a government for compensation when that government makes a law or a regulation that may have the effect of reducing the value of their investment and their company's profits.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING: UPDATE FROM SOUTH AFRICA

The Catholic Church in South Africa dedicated the month of February to awareness of human trafficking coinciding with the Feast of Josephine Bakhita, the Sudanese Saint, who was a victim of human trafficking at the age of nine. The Catholic Bishops' Conference has established an Office mandated to work against human trafficking and this Office, with the Leadership Conference of men and women religious, arranged a march at 8 am on Sunday, 15 February, ending in the presentation of a memorandum to the Station Commander of the local police station.

Several hundreds of us gathered at Regina Mundi Church in Soweto and walked in silence, wearing red bands across our mouths symbolising the silence of the victims and also of those unwilling to speak out about this modern form of slavery. The march was followed by a Eucharistic celebration in the packed church. Church and Government dignitaries spoke about the evils of human trafficking and three young women read testimonies of some of the rescued victims of trafficking. Excerpts of the texts of the memorandum to the police and these testimonies follow.

Memorandum

We, the undersigned, representing Catholic Church leaders and members, members of other organisations, members of government and concerned citizens stand here this morning as a show of solidarity with victims of human trafficking.

Human trafficking is the second most lucrative criminal business in the world. Within the region of the Southern African Development Community, South Africa is considered to be a hotspot. This scourge of our 21st century is happening in our own backyards. Human trafficking is slavery in every sense of the word. WE WANT IT TO STOP.

All people in our land have a God-given right to live in freedom and in such a way that the dignity of each person is upheld. Traffickers are, no doubt, enemies of our State.

We thank the police for their good work prior to and during the World Cup of 2010. We thank our Government for passing the Human Trafficking Bill into law in 2013. However, it is not yet enacted and we feel that the enthusiasm shown to counter human trafficking in 2010 has dwindled a lot. Therefore, we earnestly request that:

- the enthusiasm of the police to stem the tide of human trafficking shown in 2010 be renewed;
- the Government implement the new anti-trafficking Act;
- sufficient money be channelled to Provincial Departments to aid the protection and rehabilitation of victims;
- traffickers be constantly sought out and brought to book;
- this Memorandum be passed on to the Commissioner of Police of the Gauteng Province and the Minister of Police in the National Government.

We on our part promise to do all in our power to support the efforts of the police and make known suspicious cases of human trafficking to them.

Survivors warn against false job offers and promises

(Miriam) 'I was standing at a taxi rank in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, when a taxi driver pulled up and offered me a cheap fare to Pretoria, where I had wanted to go. I accepted the offer. We proceeded through border control without incident but once in South Africa I was taken to a house where I was raped and held captive. A few days later a woman arrived in a minibus and I was brought to a front room to be examined by her. I heard her say to one of the men that her boss had a buyer for four girls; she was to fetch the others on the way back. Almost immediately two other people arrived at the house. One of them took an injection needle and something else out of a packet but then got distracted by an argument that broke out over money. He turned and joined others who were bending over a table looking at something. With the focus shifted from

me, I edged slowly toward the hallway, then I ran and ran. No one followed’.

(Nolwandle) ‘My Aunt invited me, my cousin and my friend to spend the school vacation with her in Johannesburg. We went along with her only to find ourselves trapped and forced into prostitution. ‘This is how life is here in Jo’burg, you had better get used to it,’ said Auntie as she ordered me to get dressed. I was in Grade 11 at the time and lived in a rural area. My friend died of meningitis; my cousin was rescued by a client and I managed to escape from the building one day. I discovered I was pregnant and infected with HIV/AIDS. I do not know who the father of my child is’. Nolwandle recalled how her aunt was beat-en at times and agreed that maybe her aunt was a victim, too, and was sent out to recruit others.

Ayanda, a 17-year-old girl from Umlazi, Durban, got on the bus heading for Pretoria. She had answered a job advertisement and was delighted that she had actually been accepted. Her delight, however, soon turned into a nightmare. She was locked into a room by her employer where she was forced to sleep with more than 20 men a day. Food was given to her only in the evening. Eventually, she was put on the street to attract clients. It was then she plotted her escape. With the help of the police, she was brought to a place of safety and her ‘boss’ was arrested.

Source: Report from Loek Goemans (Grail Johannesburg)

**Contributions to Bulletin and responses to its content welcomed.
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