

From the Green Revolution to GMOs: Living in the Shadow of Global Agribusiness

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What can we do about the powerful transnational agribusiness companies that have captured or at the very least heavily influence [regulatory bodies](#), [research institutes](#), [trade agreements and governments](#)? How can we assess the safety and efficacy of GMOs or their other technologies and products when narratives and decision-making processes have become distorted by these companies?

Through the 'green revolution' chemical-intensive model of agriculture these corporations and their [powerful backers](#) promoted and instituted, they have been able to determine what seeds are to be used by farmers, what is to be grown and what inputs are to be applied. This, in turn, has adversely effected the [nutritional content](#) of food, led to the [over-exploitation of water and diminished drought resistance](#), [degraded soil](#), [undermined biodiversity](#), [polluted](#) the environment, [destroyed farmers' livelihoods](#) and so much more: with 60 years' farming experience behind him, [Bhaskar Save](#) outlined many of these impacts in his open letter to Indian officials some years back.

These powerful corporations increasingly hold sway over a globalised system of food and agriculture from seed to plate. And with major mergers within the agribusiness sector in the pipeline, power will be further consolidated and the situation is likely to worsen. While scientific innovation has a role to play in improving agriculture, the narrative about farming has been shaped to benefit the interests of this handful of wealthy, politically influential corporations whereby commercial interest trumps any notion of the public good.

The green revolution has proved to be disastrous in many areas (for example, see [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#)). If the technology involved had been used more judiciously and [genuinely](#) in the public interest – and had not been [married to geopolitical interests](#) resulting in the [creation of food deficit regions](#) or instituted for the commercial gain of corporations – would we not now be in a better position? And would organic farming and agroecology have received greater attention and investment and be playing a much greater role (as [research shows](#) they should), even a dominant one, in agriculture?

Instead, while transnational agribusiness pays lip service to promoting a mix of different farming systems, alternative models are marginalised and continually discredited. PR replaces fact. Wild claims are made about the successes of the green revolution (or GMOs), which certainly [should not be accepted](#) at face value, and fail to acknowledge the massive external costs of this model.

How can the public, governments and regulatory agencies really evaluate the efficacy of technologies like GMOs when commercial interests continue to distort the narrative and hide

behind slick public relations messages that are intended to mislead and misinform, while at the same time they co-opt politicians, trade policies, scientists and research?

There is of course enough independent evidence indicating the [dangers, failures and shortcomings](#) of GMOs to make anyone at least question the claims and motives of the industry, but this does not prevent the industry and its lobbyists misrepresenting the issue, smearing critics and using its enormous wealth and political clout to get GMOs onto the commercial market (see [this](#)), while [suppressing research](#) that is critical of its claims and technologies.

If we are ever going to have a system of food and agriculture that serves the interests of farmers, rural communities and consumers, rather than the interests of unaccountable corporations (that [profit](#) at the expense of [human life](#)) or extremely wealthy individuals like [Bill Gates](#) and [others](#), we require transparency, accountability and a system of decision making that does not take place within the overbearing shadow of commercial influence.

With reference to GMOs, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI) (M) recently alluded to some of the issues mentioned above by stating:

“... there should not be any commercial release of GM crops without ensuring safety for humans, animals and the environment... The seed monopolies and agribusinesses only aim to maximise profits. They are not concerned about bio-safety or issues like biodiversity or the environment.”

The statement, which can be read in full [here](#), continues:

“The Indo-US Knowledge Initiative in Agriculture with agribusinesses like Monsanto, Wal-Mart, Archer Daniels Midland, Cargill and ITC in its Board made efforts to turn the direction of agricultural research and policy in such a manner as to cater their demands for profit maximisation. Companies like Monsanto during the Vietnam War produced tonnes and tonnes of “Agent Orange” unmindful of its consequences for Vietnamese people as it raked in super profits and that character remains.”

That character remains because the aim is always to maximise profit for shareholders.

In addition to promoting and supporting local food self-sufficiency and agroecology and shielding agriculture from [the destructive impacts](#) of manipulated trade and international commodity markets, what is also required to counter the power of these corporations is a leading role at national state level for the carrying out of public research that is free from the influence of commercial interests.

Again, focusing on GMOs, the CPI (M) continues:

“Hence we are of the opinion that all such experiments should be done exclusively by the public sector and the government institutions and no multinational corporations or monopoly agribusinesses should be allowed to undertake field trials... The government is facilitating profiteering by MNCs without addressing the concerns about bio-safety, monopoly control over seeds and having a fool-proof regulatory mechanism in place... the introduction of any such innovation... should be predicated on sound research and verification

of claims open to public scrutiny.”

And in testing such claims, it should be not only the safety and environmental impacts of technologies that are taken into account, but also the potential effects on farmers, self-sufficiency, food security, biodiversity, nutrition, local economies and sustainability.

This approach should be based on democratic accountability and transparency and applies not only to India, but is also relevant for the US, Africa, Europe and every other country or region where transnational agribusiness has co-opted politicians and other key figures and bodies and behind the scenes has colluded with governments and agencies to get its products onto the market.

India continues to [dismantle its agriculture](#) for the benefit of Western agribusiness at the behest of the World Bank, and what has happened in Africa [has been described](#) as a case study of how doctrinaire economics served corporate interests to destroy a whole continent’s agriculturally productive base.

If we do not strive to follow the route advocated for by the CPI (M) (and others, of course) on a global basis, we will have giant agribusiness conglomerates continuing to steam roll governments, farmers and the public into accepting patented seeds, poisonous chemicals, degraded environments and a centralised food production system that for the sake of profit (and geopolitical gain) aims to eradicate or marginalise traditional agriculture and successful alternative models across the globe.

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