

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO): Profit, Power and Geopolitics

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Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are not essential for feeding the world [1,2], but if they were to lead to increased productivity, did not harm the environment and did not negatively impact biodiversity and human health, would we be wise to embrace them anyhow?

The fact is that GMO technology would still be owned and controlled by certain very powerful interests. In their hands, this technology is first and foremost an instrument of corporate power, a tool to ensure profit. Beyond that, it is intended to serve US global geopolitical interests. Indeed, agriculture has for a long time been central to US foreign policy.

“American foreign policy has almost always been based on agricultural exports, not on industrial exports as people might think. It’s by agriculture and control of the food supply that American diplomacy has been able to control most of the Third World. The World Bank’s geopolitical lending strategy has been to turn countries into food deficit areas by convincing them to grow cash crops – plantation export crops – not to feed themselves with their own food crops.” Professor Michael Hudson [3].

The Project for a New American Century and the Wolfowitz Doctrine show that US foreign policy is about power, control and ensuring global supremacy at any cost [4,5]. Part of the plan for attaining world domination rests on the US controlling agriculture and hijacking food sovereignty and nations’ food security.

In his book ‘Seeds of Destruction’, William Engdahl traces how the oil-rich Rockefeller family translated its massive wealth into political clout and set out to capture agriculture in the US and then globally via the ‘green revolution’ [6]. Along with its big-dam, water-intensive infrastructure requirements, this form of agriculture made farmers dependent on corporate-controlled petroproducts and entrapped them and nations into dollar dependency and debt. GMOs represent more of the same due to the patenting and the increasing monopolization of seeds by a handful of mainly US companies, such as Monsanto, DuPont and Bayer.

In India, Monsanto has sucked millions from agriculture in recent years via royalties, and farmers have been compelled to spend beyond their means to purchase seeds and chemical inputs [7]. A combination of debt, economic liberalization and a shift to (GMO) cash crops (cotton) has caused hundreds of thousands of farmers to experience economic distress,

while corporations have extracted huge profits [8]. Over 270,000 farmers in India have committed suicide since the mid to late nineties [9].

In South America, there are similar stories of farmers and indigenous peoples being forced from their lands and experiencing violent repression as GMOs and industrial-scale farming take hold [10]. It is similar in Africa, where Monsanto and The Gates Foundation are seeking to further transform small-scale farming into a corporate controlled model. They call it 'investing' in agriculture as if this were an act of benevolence.

Agriculture is the bedrock of many societies, yet it is being recast for the benefit of rich agritech, retail and food processing concerns. Small farms are under immense pressure and food security is being undermined, not least because the small farm produces most of the world's food [11]. Whether through land grabs and takeovers, the production of (non-food) cash crops for export, greater chemical inputs or seed patenting and the eradication of seed sharing among farmers, profits are guaranteed for agritech corporations and institutional land investors.

The recasting of agriculture in the image of big agribusiness continues across the globe despite researchers saying that this chemical-intensive, high-energy consuming model means Britain only has 100 harvests left because of soil degradation [12]. In Punjab, the 'green revolution' model of industrial scale, corporate dominated agriculture has led to a crisis in terms of severe water shortages, increasing human cancers and falling productivity [13]. There is a global agrarian crisis. The increasingly dominant corporate-driven model is unsustainable.

More ecological forms of agriculture are being called for that, through intelligent crop management and decreased use of chemical inputs, would be able to not only feed the world but also work sustainably with the natural environment. Numerous official reports and scientific studies have suggested that such policies would be more appropriate, especially for poorer countries [14-16].

When on occasion the chemical-industrial model indicates that it does deliver better yields than more traditional methods (a generalization and often overstated [17]), even this is a misrepresentation. Better yields but only with massive chemical inputs from corporations and huge damage to health and the environment as well as ever more resource-driven conflicts to grab the oil that fuels this model. Like the erroneous belief that economic 'growth' (GDP) is stimulated just because there becomes greater levels of cash flows in an economy (and corporate profits are boosted), the notion of improved agricultural 'productivity' also stems from a set of narrowly defined criteria.

The dominant notions that underpin economic 'growth', modern agriculture and 'development' are based on a series of assumption that betray a mindset steeped in arrogance and contempt: the planet should be cast in an urban-centric, ethnocentric model whereby the rural is to be looked down on, nature must be dominated, farmers are a problem to be removed from the land and traditional ways are backward and in need of remedy.

"People are perceived as 'poor' if they eat food they have grown rather than commercially distributed junk foods sold by global agri-business. They are seen as poor if they live in self-built housing made from ecologically well-adapted materials like bamboo and mud rather than in cinder block or cement houses.

They are seen as poor if they wear garments manufactured from handmade natural fibres rather than synthetics.” Vandana Shiva [18]

Western corporations are to implement the remedy by determining policies at the World Trade Organization, IMF and World Bank (with help from compliant politicians and officials) in order to depopulate rural areas and drive folk to live in cities to then strive for a totally unsustainable, undeliverable, environment-destroying, conflict-driving, consumerist version of the American Dream [19,20].

It is interesting (and disturbing) to note that ‘developing’ nations account for more than 80% of world population, but consume only about a third of the world’s energy. US citizens constitute 5% of the world’s population, but consume 24% of the world’s energy. On average, one American consumes as much energy as two Japanese, six Mexicans, 13 Chinese, 31 Indians, 128 Bangladeshis, 307 Tanzanians and 370 Ethiopians [21].

Despite the environmental and social devastation caused, the outcome is regarded as successful just because business interests that benefit from this point to a growth in GDP. Chopping down an entire forest that people had made a living sustainably from for centuries and selling the timber, selling more poisons to spray on soil or selling pharmaceuticals to address the health impacts of the petrochemical food production model would indeed increase GDP, wouldn’t it? It’s all good for business. And what is good for business is good for everyone else, or so the lie goes.

“Corporations as the dominant institution shaped by capitalist patriarchy thrive on eco-apartheid. They thrive on the Cartesian legacy of dualism which puts nature against humans. It defines nature as female and passively subjugated. Corporatocentrism is thus also androcentric – a patriarchal construction. The false universalism of man as conqueror and owner of the Earth has led to the technological hubris of geo-engineering, genetic engineering, and nuclear energy. It has led to the ethical outrage of owning life forms through patents, water through privatization, the air through carbon trading. It is leading to appropriation of the biodiversity that serves the poor.” [22]

The ‘green revolution’ and now GMOs are ultimately not concerned with feeding the world, securing well-rounded nutritious diets or ensuring health and environmental safety. (In fact, India now imports foods that it used to grow but no longer does [23]; in Africa too, local diets are becoming less diverse and less healthy [24].) Such notions are based on propaganda or stem from well-meaning sentiments that have been pressed into the service of corporate interests.

Biotechnological innovations have always had a role to play in improving agriculture, but the post-1945 model of agriculture has been driven by powerful corporations like Monsanto, which are firmly linked to Pentagon and Wall Street interests [25]. Motivated by self-interest but wrapped up in trendy PR about ‘feeding the world’ or imposing austerity to ensure prosperity, the publicly stated intentions of the US state-corporate cabal should never be taken at face value [26,27].

In India, Monsanto and Walmart had a major role in drawing up the Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture [28]. Monsanto now funds research in public institutions and its presence and influence compromises what should in fact be independent decision and policy making

bodies [29,30]. Monsanto is a driving force behind what could eventually lead to the restructuring and subjugation of India by the US [31]. The IMF and Monsanto are also working to ensure Ukraine's subservience to US geopolitical aims via the capture of land and agriculture [32]. The capture of agriculture (and societies) by rich interests is a global phenomenon.

Only the completely naive would believe that rich institutional investors in land and big agribusiness and its backers in the US State Department have humanity's interests at heart. At the very least, their collective aim is profit. Beyond that and to facilitate it, the need to secure US global hegemony is paramount.

The science surrounding GMOs is becoming increasingly politicized and bogged down in detailed arguments about whose methodologies, results, conclusions and science show what and why. The bigger picture however is often in danger of being overlooked. GMO is not just about 'science'. As an issue, GMO and the chemical-industrial model it is linked to is ultimately a geopolitical one driven by power and profit.

Notes

1] This report indicates the root causes for global food

shortages: <http://www.cban.ca/Resources/Topics/Feeding-the-World/Will-GM-Crops-Food-the-World>

2] Citing official reports and data sources, references in this article indicate agricultural productivity in India was better in 1760 and 1890 and that India does not require chemical-industrial agriculture let alone

GMOs: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/india-genetically-modified-seeds-agricultural-productivity-and-political-fraud/5328227>

3] <http://michael-hudson.com/2014/10/think-tank-memories/>

4] <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article1665.htm>

5] <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article40093.htm>

6] Arun Shrivastava reviews and summarizes Engdahl's book

here: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/seeds-of-destruction-the-hidden-agenda-of-genetic-manipulation-2/9379>

7] <http://www.countercurrents.org/shiva180614.htm>

8] Based on the findings of a report by researchers at Cambridge University in the

UK: <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/new-evidence-of-suicide-epidemic-among-indias-marginalised-farmers>

9] Official figure quoted by the BBC as of 2013: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-21077458>

10] http://www.theecologist.org/News/news_analysis/2267255/gm_crops_are_driving_genocide_and_genocide_keep_them_out_of_the_eu.html

11] Official report released by

GRAIN: <http://www.grain.org/article/entries/4929-hungry-for-land-small-farmers-feed-the-world-with-less-than-a-quarter-of-all-farmland>

- 12] Farmers Weekly quotes a report by researchers at the University of Sheffield in the UK: <http://www.fwi.co.uk/news/only-100-harvests-left-in-uk-farm-soils-scientists-warn.htm>
- 13] Newspaper report quoting official statistics and research findings: <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/337124/punjab-india039s-grain-bowl-now.html>
- 14] Official UN report: http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/tdr2013_en.pdf
- 15] <http://www.srfood.org/en/official-reports#> and <http://www.plantpartners.org/agroecology-reports.html>
- 16] <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14735903.2013.806408#tabModule>
- 17] <http://phys.org/news/2014-12-crops-industrial-agriculture.html>
- 18] <http://www.organicconsumers.org/btc/shiva112305.cfm>
- 19] Food policy analyst Devinder Sharma outlines the motives of Western corporations in India: <http://www.bhoomimagazine.org/article/cash-food-will-strike-very-foundation-economy>
- 20] Arundhati Roy discusses the erroneous notion of 'progress' being applied in India and the conflict and violence that has followed: <http://www.guernicamag.com/features/we-call-this-progress/>
- 21] <http://public.wsu.edu/~mreed/380American%20Consumption.htm>
- 22] <http://www.spaziofilosofico.it/numero-07/2959/economy-revisited-will-green-be-the-colour-of-money-or-life/>
- 23] Vandana Shiva describes how the 'green revolution' and 'free trade' have turned India into a net importer of foods it used to be self sufficient in: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/09/201398122228705617.html>
- 24] Article describing the plight of agriculture in Africa: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/behind-the-mask-of-altruism-imperialism-monsanto-and-the-gates-foundation-in-africa/5408242>
- 25] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/monsantos-gmo-food-and-its-dark-connections-to-the-military-industrial-complex/5389708>
- 26] Article providing factual historical insight into Monsanto and its wrongdoings: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-complete-history-of-monsanto-the-worlds-most-evil-corporation/5387964>
- 27] Analysis of Wall Street's fraudulent practices in recent times and the complicity of the entire political and economic system: <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2012/03/pers-m15.html>
- 28] http://www.democracynow.org/2006/12/13/vandana_shiva_on_farmer_suicides_the
- 29] <http://dissidentvoice.org/2009/07/monsanto-a-contemporary-east-india-company-and-corporate-knowledge-in-india/>
- 30] <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/nip-this-in-the-bud/article5012989.ece>

31] <http://www.countercurrents.org/todhunter031114.htm>

32] <http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/food-security-hostage-wall-street-and-us-global-hegemony>

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