

Green Revolution or Green Delusion?

Has an innate feeling of racial superiority caused some to see non-existent agricultural problems in Africa?

By Ellen Farney

What is a Green Revolution?

The term *Green Revolution* has been used to describe periods of **fixation on the improvement of agricultural methods and production** in different parts of the world. While permanent efforts to implement a *Green Revolution* in Asia and Latin America during the 1950’s and 1960’s, there were intense debates within the academic community throughout the late 1990’s through the 2010’s as to whether or not a *Green Revolution* would be useful in Africa.



Alliance for a Green Revolution for Africa is a foundation created in part by Bill and Melinda Gates along with the Rockefeller Foundation in 2006 in order to push the *Green Revolution* in Africa forward.¹ Funds raised by AGRA are mainly focused on genetically modifying the seeds of the most common African crops and grains. Some researchers report strong ties between AGRA and the major company, Monsanto.²

Some Historical Background

➤ Dongas in Lesotho, South Africa ◀

- 1930s: a British colonial officer named Alan Pim determined that the dongas were an issue to be addressed immediately, and he pinned native agricultural practices as their cause.
- His measures to correct the dongas damaged a piece of land approximately the size of ³ Belgium, making conditions much worse.

In many instances throughout African history, the western colonizers ignored traditional agricultural and environmental practices to implement their own ideas. They did this under the guise of bettering the land quality, whatever the ecological system, when their true goal was profit. This often had negative results.



Conflicting Research

Nombulelo Siqwana-Ndulo, “Rural Agriculture: Where Do Poor Women Farmers Stand?”

- Nombulelo Siqwana-Ndulo’s concerns are not with food biodiversity, but with the safety of the crops grown with engineered seeds. She points to a strong connection between AGRA and the major agricultural company Monsanto.
- She argues that farmers in Africa are wary of using new kinds of seeds because they do not receive the proper training to cultivate them effectively, stating that many local farmers in African villages have expressed the desire to consume only the crops that they produce organically from their own seeds.⁴



Charles Mann’s “Reseeding the Green Revolution” VS Carol Thompson’s “Africa: Green Revolution or Rainbow Evolution?”

- In his article, Mann plays the role of Thomas Malthus and points out that by the year 2030 there will not be enough food to support the population.⁵
- He claims that the *Green Revolution* in Asia and Latin America gave farmers self-sufficiency which differs from the claims of Carol B. Thompson; who claims that as a result of this revolution, small-scale farmers were forced to sell their farms and land in order to pay off their debts caused by the agricultural changes.⁶
- The two cite issues concerning irrigation and pesticides, with Mann advocating for their use and Thompson condemning them.

Richard J. Blaustein, “The Green Revolution Arrives in Africa.”

- Blaustein uses claims that there are too few crop species being grown in Africa and that they are not resilient enough to be reliable.
- His, and AGRA’s solution to this is seed engineering. He spends the majority of the article explaining why tradition African crops are not sufficient and what AGRA’s seed breeding can do to fix them.⁷
- Blaustein’s claims contrast directly with the opinion of Carol B. Thompson, who claims that it is the wide breadth of Africa’s crop species, approximately 2,000.⁸

1. Richard J Blaustein, “The Green Revolution Arrives in Africa,” *BioScience* 58 (2008): 8.
2. Nombulelo Siqwana-Ndulo, “Rural Agriculture: Where Do Poor Women Farmers Stand?” *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 1 (2007): 28.
3. James McCann, *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land: And Environmental History of Africa, 1800-1990* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999), 141.
4. Siqwana-Ndulo, “Rural Agriculture,” 28.
5. Charles Mann, “Reseeding the Green Revolution,” *Science* 277 (1997): 1038
6. Carol B. Thompson, “Africa: Green Revolution or Rainbow Evolution?” *Review of African Political Economy* 34 (2007): 563.
7. Blaustein, “The Green Revolution,” 8.
8. Thompson, “Africa: Green Revolution or Rainbow Evolution?,” 563.