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African Organizations Demand Answers from AGRA

To: Andrew Cox, Chief of Staff and Strategy, Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)
From: Muketoi Wamunyima, Country Coordinator, PELUM-Zambia;
Anne Maina, BIBA-Kenya; Nnimmo Bassey, HOMEF, Nigeria
Date: September 7th, 2020

Re: Requesting substantive responses to “False Promises” report

Dear Mr. Cox,

As African networks two of which co-published and provided research for the report, [“False Promises: The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa \(AGRA\),”](#) we are writing to publicly request substantive responses to the report’s findings. We have been disappointed in AGRA’s responses to date. [AGRA’s brief official response](#) to the study issued the day after the report was published attacked the integrity of the report’s researchers and refused to provide any evidence to refute the study’s findings that AGRA and the larger Green Revolution project are failing to meet its goals of doubling yields and incomes for 30 million small-scale farming households by 2020 while reducing food insecurity by half.

AGRA’s response also ignored the important role of the five African organizations that contributed to the study, attributing the research just to “Tufts University researchers” and the publication to one German organization rather than the nine organizations that published it. PELUM Zambia and BIBA-Kenya, which collaborated on the report and carried out case study research, strongly object to AGRA’s discounting of African farmer organizations’ role in this work.

We were further disappointed to learn that you refused to provide substantive responses when lead researcher Timothy A. Wise contacted you last month. Responses in the media by you and others at AGRA have been similarly evasive. AGRA refused our researcher’s requests early in the project to provide its own data on impacts. We used national-level data for AGRA countries because AGRA refused to provide data on its beneficiaries. AGRA’s goal of reaching 30 million smallholder households means that its target audience represents the vast majority of farming households in its focus countries. Progress would be reflected in national-level data. The data itself is from FAO and the World Bank. We supplemented that desk research with case studies on Zambia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Mali.





We carried out the study because we are concerned about a consistent lack of transparency and accountability from AGRA, which has received roughly \$1 billion in funding since 2006.

We write now to respectfully ask that AGRA provide substantive responses to the findings in the “False Promises” report. We request that AGRA make available any assessments of its progress toward achieving the goals in its 2017-2021 strategic plan and any survey data from its own monitoring and evaluation at country level. And we ask that AGRA specifically address the following findings from the “False Promises” report:

1. We found very little evidence that AGRA is benefiting 30 million smallholder households, and that it is likely benefiting larger-scale commercial farmers, mostly men, rather than smallholder women farmers.
 - a. How many farmers have benefited directly from AGRA’s interventions? The stated goal is 9 million.
 - b. How many have benefited indirectly? The goal is 21 million.
 - c. What evidence is there that women and smallholders are the primary beneficiaries of AGRA’s programs?
2. The stated goal is to double productivity for these farmers by 2020. We found no evidence that AGRA will meet this goal in any of its 13 target countries. Even for maize, a priority crop for AGRA and for African government input subsidy programs, yields increased only 29% over 12 years, far short of the goal of a 100% increase. Overall, yields for a basket of staple crops increased just 18% with some crops experiencing declines.
 - a. What evidence can AGRA offer that productivity has increased significantly across a range of staple food crops?
3. We found that AGRA and other Green Revolution programs were creating unsustainable extensification of production (especially maize production) onto new lands rather than the stated goal of promoting “sustainable intensification” through raising productivity on existing agricultural lands.
 - a. What evidence can AGRA provide that its initiatives are not resulting in unsustainable extensification to grow favored crops on new land?
4. We found no evidence that farmer incomes are increasing significantly, never mind doubling for 30 million smallholder households. We found case study evidence that farmers have found themselves in debt after purchasing Green Revolution inputs on credit.
 - a. What evidence shows that AGRA’s productivity increases have increased farmer incomes significantly?
 - b. Can AGRA provide data on farmer impacts from loan schemes for input purchases that may result in farmers falling into debt when yields and incomes do not increase?





5. We found disturbing evidence of a worsening of food insecurity across AGRA countries, with a 31% increase in the number of undernourished people since 2006. In nine of AGRA's 13 target countries the number of undernourished people increased. (In four of those, yields for staple crops decreased!)
 - a. What evidence is there that food insecurity has been reduced among smallholder farming households?
 - b. What evidence can AGRA offer to counter our finding that nutritional diversity is declining with the decrease in crop diversity, as maize and other favored crops come to replace millet, sorghum, sweet potato, and other climate-resilient nutritious crops traditionally grown by farmers?
6. AGRA recently removed its ambitious goals from its website ([see page taken down in June](#)). We concluded that this was an indication that AGRA was failing to achieve its goals.
 - a. Has AGRA abandoned its goals to double yields and incomes for 30 million smallholder households while halving food insecurity?
 - b. What are AGRA's current goals for improving productivity, incomes, and food security, and for how many farmers?

African farmers deserve a substantive response from AGRA to the findings in the report. So, do AGRA's public sector donors, who would seem to be getting a very poor return on their investments. African governments also need to provide a clear accounting for the impacts of their own budget outlays that support Green Revolution programs.

We publish this request in the interest of furthering transparency and accountability. We were disappointed to see your response in the media that AGRA is increasing its investment in public relations. This suggests that AGRA is more concerned with its image than it is with providing accountability for its work. We hope this request can refocus this important discussion on AGRA's 14-year record in increasing productivity, incomes, and food security for smallholder farmers in Africa.

Signed:

1. Anne Maina
2. Muketoi Wamunyima
3. Nnimmo Bassay

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15 September 2020

Dear Mr. Wamunyima, Mr. Bassey and Ms. Maina

Thank you very much for your letter. I am pleased to answer to a number of your questions and points raised, and perhaps to help you understand better where we are coming from. I hope it is correct to say that while we may sometimes disagree about philosophy and approach, as African institutions we are united in the desire to bring about inclusive agricultural transformation in Africa.

I regret that we did not fully reflect the role played by your three organizations heading the 'False Promises' report. We were caught by surprise by this report, having been asked at short notice to review by *Suddeutsche Zeitung*. We were sure that none of the organizations listed had approached AGRA for data or cooperation, nor were we asked for comment by any of the authors listed on the findings of the report. The country studies seemed to have been conducted by the authors without any request for collaboration with AGRA country managers, and associated government, partners, or farmers organizations. I should also note that we used the phrase 'Tufts researchers' as it is used across your report.

As we reviewed the 'False Promises' report in haste, we were unclear whether it was a standalone report that drew upon the work of Mr. Timothy Wise, as stated in the report, or a rewritten version of Mr. Wise's report "Failing Africa's Farmers". A cursory analysis showed multiple paragraphs had been reworded to a limited extent, but with almost the same meaning and structure as Mr. Wise's original report, and identical sourcing/footnoting – all without attribution to the relevant sections of Mr. Wise's paper.

It therefore was unclear how we should respond to the False Promises report, although we were not asked by the authors to do so; or should we instead respond to Mr. Wise's paper, again had we been asked to? I would note for the record Mr. Wise did not ask us to comment on his paper prior to its publication.

I should at this point thank you again for reaching out to AGRA. While we have not been able to comment on the report for the reasons I have mentioned above, we do take our responsibilities seriously as an African institution dedicated to the smallholder farmer. If we are to see change on this continent, it is important that we work together as sister organizations and try to remove the barriers to farmers realizing their potential, and to learn from each other wherever possible. Therefore we welcome your concerns and we will do our best to answer your questions.

What is AGRA's farmer reach, and do we benefit larger-scale farmers, mostly men?

Our current strategy, AGRA 2.0 uses what we have learnt in our first strategy and working through partners, (NGOs, SMEs and governments) targets reaching 9 million Small holder farmers with improved technologies through our direct investments in our partners and 21 million farmers through catalyzing/leveraging other partners resources. To that end, AGRA through a network of partners and partnerships is already reaching 8.2 million farmers directly and about 12 million indirectly against its five-



year strategic plan. We only support work with smallholder farmers and do not work to support 'larger-scale commercial farmers' directly.

Reaching gender equity is a huge challenge, for our organization as it is for many others. We are committed to gender equality. While we have made some progress, we have not yet reached gender parity in our programs, and we are concerned by the gender inequity gap in productivity across the continent. As such we continue to enhance our gender strategy to reducing inequity.

Smallholder farmers guide everything that we do. Our policy, our programming and national capacity work is aimed at freeing, supporting and catalyzing SHFs. We learned that it is not enough to simply give farmers access to inputs – broken systems have to be optimized and market failures have to be fixed; markets have to be opened, policies adjusted, and investment leveraged. In the field, we have an extensive network of local NGOs, civil society organizations and SMEs that we work with in delivering our program. These partners/grantees are explicitly accountable to AGRA for performance and delivery, but at the same time, capacity development for these partners is our surest path to sustainability and is therefore an explicit outcome of our work, from local to national level.

We have a deep monitoring system that tracks program data on a rolling basis, and have precise numbers of farmers directly reached by country. We estimate farmers indirectly reached around investments we catalyze and or leverage. We measure outcomes normally on an annual basis, and use our combined data to understand how far AGRA has progressed towards achieving its goals. We expect to draw distinct conclusions on impact at the end of our strategy.

What are AGRA's goals and are you achieving them? What about yields?

AGRA's stated goals are to directly reach 9 million farmers directly, 21 million farmers indirectly, and to support 11 countries transformation pathways. We are well on our way to achieving those goals. We use a series of targets and indicators to track progress, around for example adoption rates of better farming technologies and practices; access to improved seeds, nearest distance to an input shop (agro-dealers) and availability of inputs, etc.

In addition to inputs and good agronomy, yield is impacted by rainfall. Nonetheless, we are tracking yield data through outcome panel surveys. We planned to have completed three before end of strategy, but to date we have done one, with the second postponed due to COVID-19. We will use international best practices to collect data through to the end of our strategy, transparently publish results, and be open about successes and failures. We will continue to gather food security and income data, and we do believe there is evidence for a linkage between increased productivity and farmer incomes, although there are many other factors affecting farmer income.

Our headline goals have not changed. We do aspire to double incomes and yields, and would very much like to see this happen, with our support and that of our partners; especially given that the farmers we work with have a very low starting base and that most of what needs to be done is already known. We do appreciate that Agricultural transformation is challenging, due to deep rooted structural and historical reasons. As we see globally, hunger has been on the increase over the past 3-4 years. AGRA believes that it and its partners should continuously adapt, emphasize successes, and be honest about failures. We believe that African farmers can and will achieve doubled incomes and productivity – the challenge is how to get there in a sustainable way, and as quickly as possible. This is something AGRA is deeply committed to.



Is AGRA achieving its stated objective of promoting intensification? Are we creating 'unsustainable extensification of production?'

Our support to farmers is geared towards promoting intensification. That is why AGRA was, when it was founded, solely focused on building the technology bases and the capability for scaling intensification. This could be seen in the number of breeders we have trained at local universities, the number of universities equipped to train students in Improved Soil Fertility Management (ISFM), the number of local varieties improved so that farmers can profitably grow what they like, the local businesses whose capacities have been enhanced so that they can serve local needs or the village input shop, and the VBA supported to link it to farmers with good agronomy. All this is intended to increase productivity and lead to better returns to the farmer. These approaches form a critical base for intensification not extensification. There is no evidence that AGRA's policies or practices lead to or encourage extensification – in fact, exactly the opposite.

Can AGRA provide data on farmer impacts from loan schemes for input purchases that may result in farmers falling into debt?

AGRA is not involved in loan schemes. We do not have the capacity or the mandate. We do know that we have increased choice significantly for millions of farmers, who can choose which seeds to buy, including varieties that are drought resilient and significantly increase yields. We believe that farmers should have a right to choose, and have supported more than 110 seed companies, which in many cases have allowed locally bred seed to be accessible for farmers for the first time.

We do support micro-finance institutions to develop suitable financial services for farmers.

Your question referring Mr. Wise's allegation that AGRA is somehow linked to a supposed increase in 31% in undernourished people in AGRA countries.

This analysis is deeply flawed. A single focus on an under-nourishment indicator has led to an overstatement based, it appears, on one country's sharp demographic increase, underpinned by deep rooted structural issues.

In fact, the widely accepted and respected Global Hunger Index, which is based on a wide basket of data, shows ALL of AGRA's countries showing significant improvements in the prevalence of hunger since 2006. While we wish we could take credit for this, we would have to ascribe this to governments' policy choices and priorities, supported by organizations like AGRA, development partners, and private sector investment.

Looking Forward

As I mentioned earlier, there is no doubt that the kind of agricultural transformation that Africa needs is immensely challenging to achieve. A great deal of help is needed, whether through government policy and investment, the private sector, and development partners like AGRA and yourselves. AGRA is a learning organization, and we need to be humble about both our successes and our failures. We have had to adjust our course several times, hopefully for the better. Through this, we believe we have been largely successful in many crucial areas necessary for ag transformation to take place, but so much more needs to be done.

Even in the course of our current strategy we continue to evolve – heavily informed by emerging food systems thinking – and we are rolling out improved approaches towards nutrition, biodiversity,



regenerative agriculture and environmental sustainability. We depend on partners such as yourselves to help us to learn, but do hope you can also be open to thinking about how AGRA's work might be more successful.

This said, we make no apology for being ambitious on behalf of the African farmer. So many positive outcomes follow when African farmers prosper – the future of the continent depends on it. And we know that given the right opportunity, given the choices so long denied them, African farmers can be as prosperous and successful as any in the world. We hope that as African institutions, we can together focus on African solutions for African challenges, and serve smallholder farmer.

AGRA is open to dialogue and constructive criticism, and I invite you to engage with us directly, whether through our country teams or regional/continental fora.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Cox". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Andrew Cox



Email response to AGRA's Andrew Cox from Anne Maina, Biodiversity and Biosafety Association of Kenya
CC: Muketoi Wamunyima, PELUM Zambia; Nnimmo Bassay, HOMEF Nigeria; Rebecca Weaver, AGRA

Sent: Wednesday, October 7, 2020 8:29 AM

Subject: RE: African organisations demand answers from AGRA

Dear Mr. Cox,

Thank you for taking the time to respond to our letter.

We appreciate your thoughts on AGRA's goals, strategies, and progress, but you do not offer any real evidence of AGRA's impacts on yields, incomes, or food security for its beneficiaries. AGRA has been operating since 2006, not just since 2017, and it surely is accountable for its impacts. For example, AGRA's strategy is focused on improving yields. How much has AGRA improved yields across its beneficiary farmers and in its focus countries for a variety of staple crops?

In our letter, we posed a concrete set of questions about impacts and invited you to present evidence to counter our report's findings that yield growth is slow and uneven across staple crops, that farmer incomes are not rising much as a result, and that food security has not improved and may have gotten worse with the decline in crop and diet diversity. We would be interested in engaging in a public, evidence-based dialogue on these issues if AGRA is willing to present evidence. Perhaps a good place to start would be the "outcomes panel surveys" you refer to and the mid-term evaluation of your 2017-2021 strategy.

We look forward to continuing this dialogue on the basis of evidence that counters the findings in our False Promises report.

Best Regards,

Anne Maina

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