

6 June 2021

Bill Gates & Melinda French Gates, Co-Chairs  
BMGF  
500 5th Ave N, Seattle, WA 98109

Copied to:

Neil Watkins, Deputy Director, Program Advocacy and Communications  
Nick Austin, Director Agricultural Development  
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**INQUIRY INTO FUNDING THE ALLIANCE FOR A GREEN REVOLUTION IN AFRICA (AGRA)**

Dear Co-Chairs

We are writing as an African alliance of civil society actors. Our member networks represent millions of African citizens in 50 countries. We wish to bring to your attention our concerns about your continued support for the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA).

We ask you as a funder of AGRA to urgently reconsider your commitment to AGRA and the Green Revolution agenda and shift the focus of your support to sustainable approaches that can really make a difference. We also request that you kindly provide evidence of AGRA's success, both to demonstrate aid effectiveness and to justify your investment of funds.

AGRA was founded in 2006 with a productivist market-based approach to agricultural development centred on expanded use of commercial seeds and chemical fertilizers. AGRA's main promises were to double the agricultural yields and incomes of 30 million small-scale food producer households by 2020, thus halving hunger in the focus countries.

Several of AFSA's member organizations contributed to a 2020 study into AGRA's performance, activities, and impact. Four AFSA member organizations researched four AGRA focus countries - Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya and Mali - and submitted their findings as national case studies, providing on-the-ground information and context which were incorporated into the overall study report.

The report "[False Promises – The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa \(AGRA\)](#)" revealed that yield increases for key staple crops in the 12 years AGRA operated were low, little higher than in the period before AGRA. Instead of halving hunger, the situation in the 13 focus countries has worsened since AGRA was launched, with the number of people going hungry increasing by 30 per cent during the AGRA years – before the COVID pandemic began. The study also showed that AGRA's approach had harmed many small-scale food

producers in Zambia and Tanzania who could not repay the loans for fertilizer and hybrid seeds after the first harvest. AGRA's enforced shift from nutritious and hardy small grains like millets to mono-crop commodity maize farming was bad for soil, diets, and agrobiodiversity.

Despite repeated requests from three AFSA member organizations, AGRA failed to provide evidence of impacts<sup>1</sup> and declined to share outcomes surveys and the mid-term evaluation of its 2017-2021 strategy. Some documents were eventually secured through Freedom of Information Act requests, but remarkably they provided no evidence that AGRA is making progress in improving yields, incomes and food security for African farmers. In fact, the documents deepen our concerns about accountability because they make no reference whatsoever to AGRA's first ten years of activity. Thus far, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has declined to publish or provide its 2016 evaluation of AGRA, which might provide some of that evidence. Stonewalled by AGRA's lack of accountability and transparency, we turn to you, AGRA's funders, for answers.

AGRA celebrated its work to change African government policy as a success, reforming seed policies and biosafety regulations to increase the access of commercial seed providers to African markets, including GMOs. While questioning whether influencing African policy is a legitimate activity for a USA registered non-profit organization, we believe that such seed policy change is harmful. It often undermines crop and diet diversity while increasing farmers' dependence on expensive fossil fuel based external inputs, and weakens citizens' protection against harmful technologies.

The AGRA approach has failed on its own terms: to double the agricultural yields and incomes of 30 million households and halve hunger by 2020. AGRA now needs donors to replenish its coffers for what has proven to be an ineffective and long outdated approach. The UN HLPE 2019 report on Food Security and Nutrition documents the critical importance of agroecology. Here in Africa, ECOWAS, with the help of the FAO, has launched a 10 year program to scale out agroecology. Evidence is mounting for the role that agroecology can play in responding to Africa's food, land degradation and climate crises. The need for spreading and scaling agroecology is urgent. However, two<sup>2</sup> major collaborative studies<sup>3</sup> highlight how the imbalance of funding flows to African agricultural research and development, with minimal support to agroecology, is holding up real transformation.

In line with the False Promises report, we specifically recommend that donors:

- increase their funding to African agriculture to help meet continental funding targets.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://usrtk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Correspondence-BIBA-and-AGRA-accountability.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cidse.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/EN-Making-money-move-for-agroecology.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.biovision.ch/en/projects/international/moneyflows-hans-herren/>

Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa

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- provide no further political and financial support for AGRA and its failed Green Revolution approach.
- switch their funding from AGRA to programmes that help small-scale food producers, particularly women and youth, to develop climate-resilient ecologically sustainable farming practices such as agroecology.

We humbly repeat our request that you provide substantive evidence of the efficacy of your investment in AGRA, referring particularly to AGRA's top-level goals on productivity, hunger, and poverty reduction. Failing that, we request that you urgently reconsider your commitment to AGRA and its unaccountable Green Revolution programme, and shift your financial support to sustainable, resilient, and culturally appropriate agroecological approaches.

Sincerely,



Million Belay (PhD)

General Coordinator, Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa

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*AfSA brings together small-scale farmers, pastoralists, fishers, indigenous peoples, farmers' networks, faith-based groups, consumer associations, youth associations, civil societies, and activists from across the African continent to create a united and stronger voice for food sovereignty.*

