



ALLIANCE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN AFRICA

PULLING BACK THE VEIL: AGRA'S INFLUENCE ON AFRICA'S AGRICULTURAL POLICIES

1. AGRA'S NEW EMPHASIS ON POLICY INFLUENCE

In recent years, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) has shifted its focus away from direct fieldwork with farmers to exerting influence on government policy. This shift follows [a critical donor-commissioned 2022 evaluation](#) that showed AGRA had fallen far short of its goals to double farmer productivity and incomes and halve food insecurity with its narrow promotion of a few staple crops fed by synthetic fertilisers. That evaluation credited AGRA with being effective at influencing government policies, and that is what the Gates-Foundation-funded organisation is now focused on.

AGRA now argues that to attain agricultural transformation goals and targets, Africa requires strong policies, institutions, and leadership. To achieve this, AGRA is making a concerted effort to place external consultants within African government offices tasked with leading or supporting policy development initiatives. AGRA's support often tends to create a policy environment conducive to the increased adoption of hybrid and genetically modified (GM) seeds, increased use of chemical fertilisers, and enhanced private sector involvement in agriculture. While African governments may welcome AGRA's assistance, concerns have arisen regarding the organisation's potential to exert coercive and undue influence, undermining homegrown policy initiatives. While the Gates Foundation – AGRA's primary funder – proudly asserts that it does not engage in lobbying, AGRA's role is even more insidious: Directly crafting policies at the continental, national, and local levels.

2. AFSA'S INVESTIGATION INTO THE NATURE OF AGRA'S POLICY INTERVENTIONS

AFSA commissioned an investigative study to determine the extent of AGRA's influence and identify instances where they may have overstepped ethical boundaries, particularly in key policy areas where AGRA's actions could be construed as undemocratic or coercive. Through case study research conducted by researchers and local journalists, this investigation aims to shed light on AGRA's involvement in policy spaces where its influence has potentially compromised democratic processes or undermined national and local efforts to move away from failing Green Revolution programs.

The focus countries for this investigation are Kenya and Zambia. These countries have witnessed significant AGRA involvement in agricultural policies, particularly in areas related to agricultural investment priorities, seeds and, indirectly, the introduction of genetically engineered (GE) seeds. Most recently, Zambia has experienced AGRA's undue influence in shaping a new 10-year agriculture investment policy, highlighting the need for scrutiny and transparency in AGRA's interactions with national governments.

By identifying key policy spaces and engaging local researchers and journalists, this initiative aims to uncover instances where AGRA, working behind the scenes, is advancing its Green Revolution agenda and undermining efforts to promote agroecology and other farmer-driven, low-input approaches. With this investigation, we hope to contribute to a more informed dialogue on the organisation's role in shaping agricultural policies across Africa.

3. EARLY FINDINGS FROM THE ONGOING INVESTIGATIONS

Early findings show the growing influence of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) on agricultural policies across multiple levels, from local to continental.

At the continental level, AGRA's involvement in major African Union initiatives is shaping the future of agriculture across Africa, often prioritising corporate interests over the needs of smallholder farmers in continental forums. At the national level in Zambia, AGRA has strategically positioned itself within key institutions, steering policies toward industrial agriculture while hijacking an ongoing multi-stakeholder policy process intended to address some of the failures of previous Green Revolution-based programs. In Vihiga County, Kenya, AGRA's late entry into a local policy-making process has raised concerns about its impact on agroecological initiatives.

CONTINENTAL LEVEL: AGRA'S INFLUENCE ON AFRICAN AGRICULTURE POLICY

The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) has significantly shaped agricultural policy across Africa at the continental level. By engaging in and supporting key initiatives such as climate summits, the African Food Systems Summit, the African Union's Fertilizer and Soil Health Summit, and the Post-Malabo Process, AGRA has exerted considerable influence on the direction of African agriculture.

One of AGRA's recent involvements was in organising and funding the African Union's Fertilizer and Soil Health Summit held in Nairobi 7-9 May 2024, influencing the direction of African fertiliser policy for the next ten years. The stated goal – an outcome of the Nairobi summit – was to treble fertiliser use within ten years. AFSA participated in the event, one of the few civil society organisations to have any voice in this important gathering, and one of the few organisations calling for a shift away from synthetic fertilisers in Africa – whose overuse leaves Africa's soils acidic and less fertile. AFSA instead advocated for funding and support towards biofertilisers made from local materials.

Additionally, AGRA has been actively involved in the Post-Malabo process, a key policy initiative led by the African Union (AU), aiming to shape the next decade of agricultural policy

in Africa. This involvement includes funding critical meetings, such as the July 25 – July 30 gathering in Lusaka, where AGRA's influence on the discussions was evident, according to AFSA coordinator Million Belay, who attended the event.

"Throughout the meeting in Lusaka, the sway of these Western entities in driving the process was palpable, overshadowing the voices of African farmers, civil society, and grassroots organisations," Belay wrote in [an article for African Arguments](#).

"What was marketed as an 'inclusive multi-stakeholder consultative process' bringing together a diversity of African voices was instead a contentious process driven by external influences and corporate agendas."

The Post-Malabo process, which builds on the commitments made under the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) and the subsequent Malabo Declaration on goals and targets, is currently leading up to the Kampala Declaration charting the next ten years of African agricultural policies, set to be approved in January 2025. However, concerns have been raised about the dominance of AGRA and similar entities in this process. Critics argue that AGRA's focus on synthetic fertilisers and corporate-led agendas could undermine the interests of African farmers and shift the policy landscape away from sustainable and inclusive agricultural policies and practices.

"Several African organisations demanded that agroecology be included in the Kampala Declaration," but Belay reports that they were rebuffed. "The resistance to these ideas reflects a broader trend of sidelining indigenous knowledge and sustainable low-cost practices in favour of industrial agricultural models."

The exclusion of agroecology, food sovereignty, and farmer-managed seed systems from the discussions reflects a broader trend of sidelining indigenous knowledge and sustainable practices in favour of industrial agriculture.

The major challenge is the alignment of the Post-Malabo program with the African Development Bank's (AfDB) "Feed Africa: Food Sovereignty and Resilience" initiative, which has been criticised for promoting large-scale monocropping and corporate control over African agriculture.

According to Belay, aligning the Kampala Declaration with these compacts risks entrenching corporate control over Africa's agricultural future, undermining the continent's food sovereignty.

Despite resistance from African farmers and communities, the inclusion of biotechnology in the policy framework further illustrates the corporate influence driving the Post-Malabo process. The draft declaration includes much attention to "emerging technologies," including genetic modification, which most African governments currently do not permit. This has raised concerns about the long-term impact on Africa's agricultural future, with fears that it could increase dependence on multinational corporations for seeds and other farming inputs.

At the regional level, AGRA has influenced seed legislation and promoted the incorporation of COMESA seed trade harmonisation regulations into national laws. AGRA's country office in

Zambia is situated at the COMESA Headquarters in Lusaka, further entrenching itself into strategic regional policy-making spaces.

NATIONAL LEVEL: THE CASE OF ZAMBIA

AGRA's operations in Zambia reflect its broader strategy across Africa, where it exerts undue influence on agricultural and food system policies. This influence is characterised by undemocratic practices such as hijacking policy processes, infiltrating institutions, undermining sustainable agriculture initiatives like agroecology, and sidelining food sovereignty organisations from critical discussions.

AGRA's involvement in agriculture across Africa, including Zambia, has led to deteriorating conditions in its target countries. In its 13 focus countries, AGRA's promotion of seeds and fertilisers has failed to deliver the promised productivity revolution, resulting in increased deprivation. The collapse of Zambia's food system, highlighted in [a recent report](#) by the African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), directly results from this harmful interference.

AGRA's Undue Policy Influence

AGRA influences policy-making processes by providing financial resources to engage consultants, funding local organisations aligned with its agenda, and promoting government policies that support its push for commercial farming. In Zambia, AGRA collaborates with key institutions such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the Zambia Agricultural Research Institute (ZARI), and the Seed Control and Certification Institute (SCCI), shaping the country's agricultural policies. AGRA's country manager for Zambia described the organisation's role as akin to the government's program management unit (PMU), defining the priorities identified in the country's five-year strategy.

Development of the National Agriculture Investment Plan (NAIP II)

Since 2021, Zambia had been developing its second National Agriculture Investment Plan (NAIP II), a five-year framework for agricultural development. Initially, the NAIP II process was seen as democratic and inclusive, as it involved a broad range of stakeholders in evaluating NAIP-I. However, the process shifted when a different investment framework was introduced, developed with input from FAO-sponsored consultants and an AGRA consultant embedded within the Ministry of Agriculture, according to [a detailed report in The Elephant](#).

NAIP II initially included proposals that moved away from what stakeholders considered failures of the previous Green Revolution approach based on recommendations from an evaluation of the earlier strategy. According to a formal submission to the process by the Zambian Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity (ZAAB), "Of the nine recommendations made in the review of NAIP I, two stand out which should have been considered in the formulation of the CATSP. The first is the need to have built on the components of NAIP that had performed well (e.g. livestock, fisheries and nutrition). The review recommended intensification and scale-up of these, among other interventions."

"Furthermore, small livestock and aquaculture were seen as strategic in smallholder farmer diversification and offered better resilience to smallholder livelihoods during drought periods,

particularly due to climate change. Such programmes were regarded as instrumental in promoting household food, income and nutrition security and advanced gender empowerment and equality. Another notable recommendation was for the design of the second generation NAIP to heighten community ownership by guaranteeing community participation at every stage,” according to the ZAAB submission.

Whether these recommendations were being actively considered during the initial stages of developing NAIP II is not clear to stakeholders, but AGRA and the FAO hired consultants substituted NAIP II with the Comprehensive Agriculture Transformation Support Programme (CATSP) with little warning or consultation. Despite mentions of agricultural diversification, the new policy framework marked a shift towards a narrow range of commercial value chains, such as maize, wheat, and soybeans, aligned with the Green Revolution model. The approach prioritises private sector involvement and commercial agriculture, overshadowing food sovereignty and more diversified, smallholder-friendly approaches. During a panel discussion on the CATSP organised by the Economic Association of Zambia (EAZ) on 13th May 2023, the then Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture - Mr Green Mbozi – indicated that it would not be a bad thing “if inefficient smallholder farmers would stop farming” and pave the way for ‘efficient’ commercial farmers to produce, with expected results of reduced food prices, increased access to improved genetic resources and food and nutrition security.

An AGRA consultant within the Ministry of Agriculture was heavily involved in the drafting and promotion of the CATSP. ZAAB reported that the Consultant was the only person who could present and explain the new program in later validation meetings.

Criticism and Reaction to CATSP

The CATSP has faced significant opposition from farmer groups and NGOs. Organisations such as ZAAB, FIAN Zambia and PELUM raised concerns about the process and its outcomes, pointing to:

- **Flawed Process:** The CATSP development was criticised as top-down and exclusive, marginalising key stakeholders and alternative approaches.
- **Promotion of Industrialised Value Chains:** The policy advanced an industrialised approach over more holistic food systems approach that support informal, diversified food systems.
- **Neglect of Smallholder Farmers:** CATSP fails to address critical issues for smallholder farmers, such as biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, and soil health.
- **Redirected Public Financing:** Public funds are being redirected to subsidise export commodity value chains, facilitating corporate financialization and digitalisation of Zambia’s food systems.
- **Reversal of Progress Against GMOs:** CATSP reverses Zambia’s progress against GMOs by dismantling its rigorous biosafety framework, opening the door to GM crops.
- **Intellectual Property Regime:** The intellectual property regime is being revamped to favour corporate agribusiness, specifically by pushing to join the UPOV91 Convention

on plant breeders' rights, undermining national efforts to promote farmer-managed seed systems.

“The Green Revolution is a mirage; it's colonisation in disguise promoting capitalism from the global North to continue controlling our food systems, environment, well-being, and livelihoods,” Sarah Haloba from the Zambian Governance Foundation, a member of ZAAB, told investigators. She added: “As Zambians, we have failed to make decisions with regard to agriculture because we are held by strings of those who control our food systems.”

Vladimir Chilinya of the farmer organization FIAN Zambia was particularly concerned about the new program's promotion of large-scale industrial agriculture projects, farm blocks advocated by the African Development Bank as well: “The proposed model of farming blocks under CATSP will result in forced evictions, displacements and land grabbing. This will affect smallholder farmers as they will not be able to produce food for themselves. The farming blocks will also result in commercialisation of water resources at the expense of local communities who require the same water resources for their domestic use, livestock and agriculture.”

The development of CATSP in Zambia is a clear example of AGRA's hijacking of agricultural policy-making. By embedding its commercial farming agenda within government frameworks, AGRA has marginalised alternative, more sustainable approaches to agriculture. Through strategic positioning, financial influence, and control over the consultation process, AGRA has raised significant concerns about the future of Zambia's agricultural and food systems.

“There is need to re-think this whole Idea of green revolution,” said Eugene Kabilika, a member of ZAAB. “The real ‘green’ revolution is the promotion of agroecology that is poised to trigger regeneration of all life forms and matter that support it on our planet and renewed energies of sustainable production of healthy food for people, animals and all living creatures. This will save our common home from disaster and death.”

LOCAL LEVEL: THE CASE OF VIHIGA COUNTY, KENYA.

AGRA's influence is evident even at the local level, such as in Vihiga County in Kenya, where it has infiltrated farmer-led efforts to develop alternatives to the Green Revolution model.

Kenya, which hosts AGRA's headquarters, is dominated by the Green Revolution narrative. Like much of Africa, the country's agricultural and food systems face significant challenges, including the loss of agrobiodiversity, declining soil fertility, low agricultural productivity, poor agricultural diversification, inadequate dietary diversity, misuse of agrochemicals, and the emergence of crop and animal pests, diseases, and invasive species. Additionally, land degradation is a pressing concern.

These issues are particularly severe in Kenya's densely populated Western region, especially in Vihiga County, where years of maize monocultures and heavy chemical fertiliser use have degraded the soils and weakened the local food system.

In response, the community, through local administration newly empowered by the decentralisation of Kenya's agricultural policy-making, sought to establish an institutional

framework to effectively manage and promote agroecological practices. This effort includes adopting Community Agroecology Promoters trained in all aspects of the agri-food system to disseminate knowledge to farmers and stakeholders along the value chains.

The policy's goals include improving soil health, enhancing food quality, and controlling the spread of invasive species on farmlands, with key components focusing on organic farming and regenerative agriculture.

An excerpt from the Vihiga County Agroecology Policy illustrates how comprehensive the planning has been: *"It is prudent that this policy, along with all legal and institutional frameworks within the county aimed at achieving proper agroecological practices, be consistently implemented. The legal safeguards and strategic interventions proposed within the policy should be adhered to, creating an enabling environment to fast-track and support the implementation of proper agroecological practices for a sustainable food system in Vihiga County."*

After nearly two years of county-level work to develop this program, stakeholders are now concerned that AGRA may derail this process with its sudden appearance as a sponsor of the programme.

AGRA's Influence in Vihiga County

AGRA's undemocratic entry into the Vihiga agroecology policy-making process has alarmed local farmers and agroecology supporters, who fear dilution or derailment of their efforts. Despite joining the process late, AGRA managed to sway key county officials by funding and supporting capacity-building initiatives.

Ferdinand Wafula of Bio Gardening Innovations (BIOGI), a key driver of agroecology efforts in the region, expressed surprise at the sudden involvement of FOLU, an AGRA affiliate, which was recognised as a stakeholder only in the final stages of policy preparation.

"During our last technical meeting in preparation for public participation in this policy, we were surprised to see FOLU appear as one of the stakeholders being acknowledged. This took many of us by surprise as they were rumoured to have funded and supported capacity-building for top county officials on agroecology," said Wafula.

He said he noted a shift in narrative and the introduction of terminology not originally part of the Agroecology Policy, which BIOGI and other partners initially championed.: "We notice the inclusion of 'Climate-smart agri-food systems' in strategies related to production and soil health, which raises concerns about what this entails," Wafula told investigators.

A senior official involved in developing Vihiga County Agroecological policy said the local government supports regenerative agriculture which incorporates soil health and food quality. "With agroecology, we will incorporate agroforestry, mushroom cultivation, multi-storey farming and climate-smart activities," he said, echoing AGRA's terminology.

AGRA often uses terms such as "climate-smart agriculture" to obscure its support for chemical fertilisers and GMOs. This allows AGRA to present an image of supporting

sustainable practices while continuing to promote high-input agricultural methods that do not align with the principles of true agroecology. Earlier plans had not included such terms.

This shift has led to scepticism among other stakeholders about the county's commitment to agroecology.

AGRA's Financial Influence

AGRA has leveraged its financial resources to influence the Vihiga agroecological policy-making process, sidelining local initiatives. When questioned about AGRA's late entry, a county official acknowledged that AGRA, like other partners (e.g., PELUM Kenya, Bioversity International, and Seed Savers Network-Kenya), is supporting the policy by facilitating workshops and capacity-building initiatives for county staff. AGRA has also funded meetings with Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) and was set to print publicity materials for the public participation phase.

Other informants expressed concern that AGRA's involvement in agroecology policies is undermining the transition to more sustainable farming systems and delegitimising the policy-making process in the eyes of genuine agroecology proponents.

"While I am yet to see any technical input from AGRA, we fear that AGRA might later influence the implementation strategy. It is from this point that we fear the dilution of the policy. It is at this stage when they will introduce their interests," said one informant. He added: "We can't trust AGRA, the agent of industrial agriculture, to drive the agroecology agenda."

Pro-agroecology civil society organisations advocate for protecting future agroecology policy-making processes from being co-opted by Green Revolution interests. Wafula of BIOGI emphasised the need for secure funding to shield these processes from being hijacked: "He who pays the piper calls the tune," said Wafula. "There's a need to protect agroecology policy developments by securing enough funding for the process. We must ring-fence the process by setting the rules of engagement from the beginning of future agroecology policy efforts."

4. CONCLUSION

Early evidence from AFSA's ongoing investigation suggests that the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) has shifted its focus from field-level interventions to a more insidious approach that prioritises influencing agricultural policy across the continent. While AGRA's efforts may claim to be supporting agricultural development, the evidence gathered in this investigation reveals a pattern of undue influence that often compromises the sovereignty of African nations and undermines sustainable agricultural practices.

The case studies from Kenya and Zambia highlight the extent of AGRA's involvement in shaping policies that favour industrial agriculture, often at the expense of smallholder farmers, agroecology, and food sovereignty. The organisation's strategic positioning within government institutions and its financial backing of policy processes have raised transparency concerns, particularly regarding the lack of inclusivity and the sidelining of alternative, more sustainable approaches to agriculture.

As Africa continues to develop its agricultural policies, it is crucial to ensure that these processes are democratic, transparent, and inclusive. The future of Africa's food systems depends on the ability of its governments and people to resist external pressures and prioritise policies that are in the best interests of their farmers, ecosystems, and communities. The findings of this investigation call for greater scrutiny of AGRA's role in policy-making and a re-evaluation of the influence wielded by external entities in shaping Africa's agricultural future.

“AGRA’s fingerprints are all over Africa’s agricultural policies,” says AFSA’s Million Belay. “They represent an attack on African food sovereignty.”

AFSA’s investigation is ongoing. A more detailed report on the findings is expected in the coming weeks.

ABOUT AFSA

The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) is a continental coalition of civil society organizations dedicated to advancing the causes of food sovereignty and agroecology across the African continent. Our alliance comprises diverse entities, including African food producer networks, African CSO networks, indigenous people's organizations, faith-based organizations, women and youth groups, consumer movements, and international organizations aligned with AFSA's mission. Currently, AFSA is a network of networks with 41 member organizations actively engaged in 50 African countries, impacting approximately 200 million individuals.

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