



ALLIANCE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN AFRICA

CHALLENGING THE GREEN REVOLUTION

Exposing AGRA's Undue Influence on African Agricultural Policies

Investigative Report



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) was established in 2006 with ambitious goals to double farmer productivity and incomes while halving food insecurity in the 13 African focus countries by 2020. However, an independent 2022 evaluation revealed significant shortcomings in achieving these goals, prompting AGRA to pivot toward influencing agricultural policy across Africa. This report, commissioned by the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), investigates AGRA's policy influence in Ghana, Kenya, Mali, and Zambia. It uncovers patterns of undue influence, the marginalization of agroecological practices, and the prioritization of corporate-driven agriculture.

AGRA's advocacy strategy increasingly involves embedding external consultants within African government ministries to shape policies promoting hybrid and genetically modified (GM) seeds, synthetic fertilizers, and export-oriented supply chains. These policies encourage corporate-driven industrial agriculture, often bypassing democratic processes, marginalizing smallholder farmers, and sidelining sustainable, agroecological alternatives.

Key Findings

1. Policy Influence at Multiple Levels: AGRA exerts significant influence on agricultural policies at national, regional, and continental levels, often leveraging financial resources and partnerships with governments and international organizations to advance its agenda. One influential initiative supported by AGRA is the Africa Seed and Biotechnology Partnership Platform (ASBPP), which was approved in 2007 by the African Union. It aims to create a conducive environment for competitive seed systems in Africa. This process requires the formalization and commercialization of seed systems with strict rules and standards for the distribution of seeds. Farmers' seeds do not typically meet these standards and are at risk of being completely neglected.

2. Marginalization of Agroecology: Agroecological approaches that prioritize biodiversity, healthy soils, and local food systems are routinely sidelined in favour of industrial agriculture, which depends on external inputs and corporate seed systems. In Vihiga County, Kenya, AGRA shifted agroecological policymaking toward "climate-smart agriculture," a term often used to promote industrial farming practices.

3. Transparency and Accountability Deficits: AGRA's interventions, such as its role in Zambia's Comprehensive Agricultural Transformation Support Programme (CATSP), lack transparency, raising concerns about external actors steering sovereign decision-making.

4. Corporate-Driven Agricultural Systems: AGRA's initiatives prioritize large-scale commercial farming, often at the expense of smallholder farmers, food sovereignty, and long-term environmental sustainability.

5. Continental Impact: AGRA's influence in shaping key continental frameworks—such as the Post-Malabo process and the African Union's Fertilizer and Soil Health Summit—promotes the use of hybrid seeds and synthetic fertilizers, reinforcing Africa's dependence on external inputs. For example, the AU Fertilizer and Soil Health Summit emphasized the importance of fertilizers for boosting agricultural productivity and produced a ten-year roadmap to triple fertilizer use across the continent.

Conclusions

AGRA's influence on agricultural policy has resulted in systemic shifts toward corporate-driven industrial agriculture, undermining food sovereignty, environmental sustainability, and agroecological practices. The organization's approach prioritizes profit-driven models over the needs and resilience of smallholder farmers, raising significant concerns about accountability, transparency, and the long-term viability of Africa's agricultural systems.

Recommendations to decision makers at national and pan-African level

1. **Prioritize Agroecological Frameworks:** Integrate agroecology, food sovereignty, and farmer-managed seed systems into national and continental policies.
2. **Enhance Policy Transparency:** Mandate public and meaningful consultations and oversight in policymaking processes at all levels.
3. **Safeguard Smallholder Interests:** Advocate for policies supporting smallholder farmers and sustainable practices.
4. **Counter Corporate Influence:** Develop monitoring frameworks to address undue corporate influence.
5. **Foster Advocacy Campaigns:** Mobilize regional and international partnerships to amplify the voices of agroecology advocates.
6. **Increase Accountability for External Actors:** Demand adherence to transparency and accountability standards for external organizations involved in policymaking.

This report underscores the urgent need to shift the narrative and policy focus from corporate-driven industrial agriculture to agroecology and food sovereignty. By addressing the structural imbalances perpetuated by AGRA's approach, African governments and civil society can reclaim their agricultural systems, ensuring they are sustainable, inclusive, and resilient to future challenges.

“AGRA's fingerprints are all over Africa's agricultural policies. They represent an attack on African food sovereignty.”

—Million Belay, PhD, AFSA General Coordinator

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) has shifted its focus from directly working with farmer groups and agro-entrepreneurs to influencing policies at national and regional levels. This strategic pivot follows a critical 2022 donor-commissioned evaluation, which revealed that AGRA had fallen far short of its ambitious goals to double farmer productivity and incomes and halve food insecurity in its 13 focus countries. These shortcomings were attributed to AGRA's narrow focus on promoting a few staple crops like maize reliant on synthetic fertilizers and improved seeds. Despite these failings, the evaluation highlighted AGRA's effectiveness in influencing government policies—a capability the Gates Foundation-funded US organization has since prioritized.

AGRA now asserts that achieving agricultural transformation in Africa requires robust policies, institutions, and leadership. To this end, AGRA has intensified its efforts to embed external consultants within African government offices, where they lead or support policy development initiatives. These efforts often result in policy environments that promote the adoption of hybrid and genetically modified (GM) seeds, increased use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and strengthened corporate power over African food systems.

While some African governments welcome AGRA's technical and financial assistance, concerns have emerged about the organization's potential to exert coercive and undue influence. Critics argue that AGRA's involvement risks undermining African, bottom-up policy initiatives by steering them toward a corporate-driven agenda. Although the Gates Foundation, AGRA's principal funder, maintains that it does not engage in lobbying, AGRA's approach is seen as even more pervasive—directly directing and shaping agricultural policies at continental, regional, and national levels.

2.0 BACKGROUND

AFSA commissioned an investigative study to examine the extent of AGRA's policy influence and uncover instances where it may have crossed ethical boundaries, particularly in areas where its actions could be considered undemocratic or coercive. This study seeks to highlight cases where AGRA's involvement has undermined democratic processes, created coercive policy environments, and/or sidelined agroecological approaches in favour of its Green Revolution agenda. The investigation focuses on Ghana, Kenya, Mali, and Zambia —countries with significant AGRA involvement in agricultural policies related to investment priorities, production systems, and seeds, including the indirect promotion of genetically engineered (GE) seeds. Notably, Zambia recently experienced AGRA's influence in shaping a new 10-year agricultural investment policy, underscoring AGRA's appetite for control over policy outcomes in its focus countries.

Since its inception in 2006, AGRA has claimed to promote increased productivity and prosperity for smallholder farmers. In 2017, AGRA launched the Partnership for Inclusive Agricultural Transformation in Africa (PIATA), aiming to improve incomes and food security for 30 million households across 11 focus countries by 2021. However, independent evaluations, such as Mathematica's 2022 assessment, revealed significant shortcomings, including limited gains in productivity, farmers' incomes, and food security. In response, AGRA shifted its strategy from farmer-level interventions to influencing national and regional agricultural policies. This pivot emphasized corporate-driven agricultural systems, including hybrid or improved seeds, and private-sector-led models, often at the expense of agroecological and farmer-driven approaches.

A cornerstone of AGRA's strategy has been the deployment of external consultants embedded within African government ministries to drive agricultural policy reforms aligned with AGRA's Green Revolution agenda. This approach has often marginalized and undermined agroecological and indigenous farming practices and knowledge. AGRA's influence extends beyond national ministries to regional organizations like the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and continental platforms such as the African Union's Post-Malabo process, where it advocates for policies emphasizing corporate-driven industrial agriculture and chemical inputs such as synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

Several concerning patterns of AGRA's policy influence have emerged:

Ghana: AGRA played a role in the Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ) program, which faced corruption allegations within its subsidy schemes. Although AGRA attributed these issues to government inefficiencies, its involvement raised accountability concerns. Phase II of the program, which focuses on large-scale commercial farming, reflects AGRA's shift toward industrial agriculture. AGRA's collaboration with USAID to draft fertilizer legislation and its work with the Ministry of Agriculture to influence seed reforms have further raised questions about its policymaking influence.



- **Kenya:** AGRA influenced the dismantling of the Strategic Food Reserve Program, a vital safety net for national food security, citing corruption and inefficiency. It also promoted bundling agricultural insurance with inputs like fertilizers and hybrid seeds, favouring private-sector actors. In Vihiga County, AGRA redirected agroecological policymaking toward "climate-smart agriculture," a term often used to advocate for industrial farming practices.
- **Zambia:** AGRA's involvement in the National Agriculture Investment Plan (NAIP II)—now known as the Comprehensive Agriculture Transformation Support Program (CATSP)—prioritized export-oriented supply chains, sidelining smallholder farmers' priorities and initiatives and agroecology. AGRA also facilitated the creation of Agricultural Transformation Offices (ATOs), modelled on Ethiopia's Agricultural Transformation Agency, embedding external consultants within ministries to align policies with its agenda.



AGRA has also partnered with authoritarian regimes to reform seed systems, increasing private-sector investment while excluding critical civil society voices and undermining participatory governance. In Tanzania and Nigeria, AGRA's involvement in drafting contentious seed laws has raised concerns about monopolizing seed markets for corporate entities while undermining farmer-managed seed systems (FMSS).

The key criticisms of AGRA's approach include:

1. **Marginalization of Agroecology:** Emphasis on corporate-driven industrial agriculture and hybrid seeds undermines farmer-driven, sustainable approaches that prioritize biodiversity and resilience.
2. **Conflicts of Interest:** AGRA's financial and technical support often aligns with private-sector goals, raising concerns about monopolization of inputs and market control.
3. **Lack of Accountability:** Embedding consultants within government ministries and crafting policies without transparency raises questions about undue influence over sovereign governance.

AGRA leverages financial power to bolster institutions and policymakers aligned with its agenda. For instance, its involvement in Zambia's CATSP emphasized export-driven agriculture over local food systems. Similarly, in Vihiga County, Kenya, AGRA's focus shifted agroecological policymaking toward "climate-smart agriculture," a term that is not clearly defined and often used to promote industrial agriculture.

Overall, AGRA's activities have been widely criticized for advancing corporate-driven industrial farming systems while marginalizing agroecological practices and undermining democratic processes.

3.0 FINDINGS

The findings highlight AGRA's growing influence on agricultural policies at local, national, regional, and continental levels, often prioritizing corporate-driven approaches over the needs of smallholder farmers.

3.1 CONTINENTAL LEVEL: AGRA'S INFLUENCE ON AFRICAN AGRICULTURE POLICY

At the continental African level, AGRA has played a significant role in shaping agricultural policy across Africa by engaging in key African Union (AU) initiatives, such as climate summits, the African Food Systems Summit, the African Union's Fertilizer and Soil Health Summit, and the Post-Malabo Process.

One notable example is AGRA's involvement in organizing and funding the African Union's Fertilizer and Soil Health Summit that took place in Nairobi from May 7–9, 2024. The summit aimed to underscore the critical role of fertilizers and soil health in promoting agricultural productivity across Africa. It brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including African Heads of State and Government, ministers, development partners, and private sector representatives. Among other things, it resulted in a ten-year roadmap aiming to triple fertilizer use across Africa. While AGRA and similar entities promoted synthetic fertilizers,

AFSA, one of the few civil society organizations present, advocated for a shift toward biofertilizers made from local materials, emphasizing the detrimental effects of synthetic fertilizers, such as soil acidification and declining fertility. AGRA's major involvement in the African Union summit was evident when AFSA was instructed to pay exhibition and side event fees directly into AGRA's bank account.

AGRA has played a significant role in the Post-Malabo process, which builds upon the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and the Malabo Declaration. This initiative culminated in the adoption of the Kampala Declaration and the CAADP Strategy and Action Plan (2026–2035) during the African Union's Extraordinary Summit held in Kampala, Uganda, from January 9 to 11, 2025.

Critics, including AFSA through the coordinator Million Belay, have raised concerns about the disproportionate influence of corporate and external entities, directly and through AGRA, in this process. Writing for African Arguments, Belay described the Lusaka meetings (July 25–30, 2024) as a "contentious process driven by external influences and corporate agendas" rather than the "inclusive multi-stakeholder consultation" it claimed to be.

Calls from African civil society for the inclusion of agroecology, food sovereignty, and farmer-managed seed systems in the Kampala Declaration were reportedly rebuffed. This exclusion reflects a broader trend of sidelining indigenous knowledge and sustainable practices in favour of industrial agricultural models. Critics argue that aligning the Post-Malabo framework with the African Development Bank's (AfDB) Feed Africa: Food Sovereignty and Resilience initiative risks promoting large-scale monocropping and consolidating corporate control over Africa's agricultural systems. The Kampala Declaration also emphasizes "emerging technologies".

While the final text of the Kampala Declaration does not explicitly mention GMOs, the broader strategy and action plan acknowledge the potential role of emerging technologies in achieving agricultural transformation. This raises concerns about long-term dependency on multinational corporations for seeds and farming inputs. While many African governments currently restrict genetically modified organisms (GMOs), the inclusion of "emerging technologies" in the policy framework underscores the corporate influence driving the Post-Malabo process.

AGRA's Programme for Africa's Seed Systems (PASS) was central to efforts aimed at replacing farmer-managed seed systems with high-input hybrid varieties. Through its agro-dealer network—which distributed these seeds and synthetic fertilizers—and its Policy and Partnerships Programme, AGRA lobbied African governments directly and through regional bodies to fast-track laws favouring seed companies. These efforts focused on implementing regionally harmonized seed regulations that protect corporate interests and promote commercial seed systems.

One key initiative backed by AGRA is the Africa Seed and Biotechnology Partnership Platform (ASBPP), endorsed by the African Union in 2007. The ASBPP seeks to create a market-driven seed sector by formalizing and commercializing seed systems with strict standards for distribution. As a result, farmers' seeds—which often don't meet these criteria—risk being sidelined. AGRA has funded and supported ASBPP activities, channelling resources into initiatives that promote seed quality improvements and biotechnology, while also building partnerships to advance the platform's goals.

At the sub-regional level, AGRA has played a key role in influencing seed legislation by promoting the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Seed Trade Harmonisation Regulations. Adopted in 2014, these regulations aim to facilitate the movement of seeds across COMESA's 21 member states by establishing common protocols for seed certification, variety release, and phytosanitary measures.

The regulations are binding and require member states to align their national laws accordingly. Under this framework, a new seed variety tested and approved in at least two member states over two seasons can be listed in the COMESA Regional Variety Catalogue and legally marketed in all member states. By supporting the adoption of these harmonised rules, AGRA has advanced its agenda of promoting uniform, corporate-led seed systems across the region. Its influence is further reinforced by the strategic location of its country office within the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka, which positions AGRA close to key regional decision-makers.

3.2 NATIONAL LEVEL INFLUENCE

3.2.1 THE CASE OF ZAMBIA

AGRA's operations in Zambia exemplify its broader strategy across Africa, marked by significant influence over agricultural and food system policies. This influence is often exerted through undemocratic practices, including hijacking policy processes, embedding itself within institutions, undermining sustainable agriculture initiatives like agroecology, and excluding food sovereignty organizations from critical discussions.

AGRA's presence in Zambia has contributed to deteriorating agricultural outcomes, echoing its impact across its 13 focus countries. Despite promoting improved seeds and chemical fertilizers as solutions to drive a productivity revolution, AGRA has failed to deliver on its promises, leading to increased deprivation. The collapse of Zambia's food system, as highlighted in a recent African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) report, underscores the damaging effects of the Green Revolution.

3.2.1.1 AGRA's Undue Policy Influence

AGRA exerts considerable influence over policymaking in Zambia by deploying financial resources to fund consultants, supporting local organizations aligned with its agenda, and steering government policies toward its vision of corporate-driven industrial agriculture. In Zambia, AGRA collaborates closely with key institutions such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the Zambia Agricultural Research Institute (ZARI), and the Seed Control and Certification Institute (SCCI). Notably, AGRA's country manager for Zambia has described the organization's role as comparable to the government's Program Management Unit (PMU), directly shaping the country's 10-year agricultural investment strategy—the Comprehensive Agricultural Transformation Support Programme (CATSP).

3.2.1.2 The National Agriculture Investment Plan (NAIP II) turns into CATSP

In 2021, Zambia began developing its second National Agriculture Investment Plan (NAIP II), a five-year framework for agricultural development. Initially, the process was seen as inclusive and democratic, involving a wide range of stakeholders in evaluating the shortcomings of NAIP-I. The Zambian Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity (ZAAB) highlighted recommendations from the NAIP-I review, which emphasized building on successful components like livestock, fisheries, and nutrition. These programs were seen as critical for smallholder farmer diversification, resilience to climate change, and promoting food security, income, and gender equality.

However, the process took a dramatic turn when AGRA and FAO-sponsored consultants introduced a new framework— the CATSP—with little prior consultation, effectively sidelining other voices and alternative approaches. This shift marked a departure from the inclusive approach initially envisioned for NAIP II. The CATSP, aligned with AGRA's Green Revolution model, emphasized a narrow focus on commercial supply chains such as maize, wheat, and soybeans, prioritizing private sector involvement and large-scale agriculture.

During a panel discussion organized by the Economic Association of Zambia (EAZ) on May 13, 2023, the then Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Mr. Green Mbozi, suggested that "inefficient smallholder farmers" should exit farming to make way for "efficient" commercial operations. This perspective underscored the CATSP's prioritization of commercial farming at the expense of smallholder farmers and food sovereignty.

AGRA's influence over the CATSP process was profound. An AGRA consultant embedded within the Ministry of Agriculture played a central role in drafting and promoting the new program. According to ZAAB, this consultant was the sole individual who understood the framework enough to present and explain the CATSP during validation meetings. At that time, it seemed not even key technical staff in the Ministry of Agriculture understood the framework.

3.2.1.3 Criticism and Reaction to CATSP

The CATSP has faced substantial opposition from farmer groups and NGOs, including ZAAB, FIAN Zambia, and PELUM Zambia. These organizations have criticized both the process behind CATSP's development and its projected outcomes, raising the following concerns:

- **Flawed Process:** CATSP was developed through a top-down and exclusive process, marginalizing key stakeholders and ignoring alternative, agroecological approaches.
- **Promotion of Industrialized Supply Chains:** The policy prioritizes industrial agriculture over a holistic approach that supports informal and diversified food systems.
- **Neglect of Smallholder Farmers:** CATSP fails to address critical issues such as biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, and soil health—key concerns for smallholder farmers and agricultural sustainability.
- **Redirected Public Financing:** Public funds are being redirected to subsidize export commodity supply chains, furthering corporate control and the financialization and digitalization of Zambia's food systems.

- **Reversal of Progress Against GMOs:** CATSP undermines Zambia's progress against GMOs by dismantling its rigorous biosafety framework, opening pathways for GM crops.
- **Intellectual Property Regime:** The program promotes corporate-friendly intellectual property laws by pushing Zambia to join the 1991 Act of the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV), which grants commercial seed breeders exclusive rights over new plant varieties they develop and threatens farmer-managed seed systems and national sovereignty over seeds.

Voices of Concern

- **Sarah Haloba, Zambian Governance Foundation:**

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

- **Vladimir Chilinya, FIAN Zambia:**

Chilinya expressed particular concern about CATSP's promotion of large-scale industrial agriculture projects, such as the farm blocks advocated by the African Development Bank. *"The proposed model of farming blocks under CATSP is likely to 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 commercialization of water resources at the expense of local communities who require the same water for domestic use, livestock, and agriculture,"* Chilinya said.

- **Eugene Kabilika, ZAAB Member:**

"There is a need to rethink this whole idea of the Green Revolution," said Kabilika. "The real 'Green' Revolution is the promotion of agroecology, poised to trigger the regeneration of all life forms and matter that support it on our planet. This renewed focus on sustainable production of healthy food for people, animals, and all living creatures will save our common home from disaster and death."

Summary

The development of the CATSP in Zambia highlights AGRA's significant influence in steering agricultural policy toward a corporate-driven farming agenda. By embedding its objectives within government frameworks and leveraging financial resources and strategic positioning, AGRA has marginalized sustainable approaches like agroecology, raising concerns about the future of Zambia's agriculture. Critics argue that the CATSP framework does not speak to Zambia's context and farmers' needs, its industrialized focus undermines smallholder farmers, prioritizes corporate interests, and jeopardizes progress on food sovereignty and environmental sustainability.

This has intensified calls for a paradigm shift toward agroecology as a sustainable and inclusive alternative for Zambia's agricultural systems.

AGRA's approach in Zambia illustrates a broader strategy that undermines local food systems, marginalizes smallholder farmers, and promotes corporate-driven agriculture. By prioritizing commercial supply chains and private-sector involvement, AGRA's interventions disregard the critical role of agroecology and food sovereignty in building resilient and inclusive agricultural systems.

“AGRA failed to deliver on its own goals using its own model of agricultural development. They have no authority, therefore, to guide policy” – Mutinta Nketani, ZAAB

3.2.2 THE CASE OF GHANA

AGRA's involvement in Ghana's agricultural sector, particularly through its support for the Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ) program, fertilizer policies, and seed law reforms, has raised significant concerns about its influence on policymaking, governance, and smallholder farmers.

3.2.2.1 PLANTING FOR FOOD AND JOBS (PFJ) PROGRAM

AGRA's participation in the PFJ program has sparked debates about its role in shaping Ghana's agricultural policy:

Subcontracting Seed Distribution: Under the PFJ, the government supplies selected farmers with improved seeds and fertilizers at a subsidized rate. In 2019, the government subcontracted seed distribution to private agents. This decision raised concerns among stakeholders about the competency of these contractors and the risk of fraud and mismanagement. The lack of adequate oversight undermined the integrity of the subsidy system that AGRA had promoted as a competitive seed market initiative. .

Phase II Shift: The second phase of the PFJ, launched in 2023, marked a shift toward large-scale farming. This five-year plan aims to transform the agricultural landscape by moving from small-scale farming to larger-scale operations and prioritizes agribusiness over smallholder farmers. The Minister of Agriculture's remarks about corruption in the original PFJ system reflect governance challenges that AGRA's involvement may have exacerbated.

AGRA's Position: Although AGRA claimed success with PFJ, evaluations suggest that its role could be seen as complicit in the mismanagement of funds by the government. A lack of a robust risk assessment and mitigation strategy further complicates AGRA's accountability in the program.

3.2.2.2 FERTILIZER LEGISLATION AND GUIDELINES

AGRA has played a pivotal role in shaping fertilizer policies in Ghana, which has generated mixed reactions:

Organic Fertilizer Guidelines: In 2022, AGRA, alongside USAID, assisted the Ministry of Food and Agriculture in drafting guidelines for organic fertilizers. The guidelines outline procedures for establishing organic fertilizer production facilities, registration requirements for producers, sampling and testing protocols. While this initiative demonstrates AGRA's influence in setting national agricultural policies, it raises questions about the extent of its authority in determining agricultural practices.

Formation of Fertilizer Platform Ghana (FPG): The FPG is a public-private, multi-stakeholder dialogue platform established to address issues within Ghana's fertilizer sector. Its primary objectives include promoting increased agricultural productivity through the use of fertilizers and soil amendments. AGRA's involvement in the FPG to resolve policy issues in the fertilizer sector highlights its collaborative influence. However, critics suggest this could lead to biased outcomes favouring AGRA's partners over the interests of smallholder farmers.

3.2.2.3 SEED LAW DOMESTICATION AND REFORMS

AGRA's engagement in seed law reforms in Ghana reflects its broader strategy of aligning local laws with international regulatory frameworks. However, this has raised concerns about its implications for smallholder farmers and seed sovereignty:

- **Seed Policy Action Node:** By promoting new seed laws, AGRA has facilitated market access for foreign companies like Monsanto (now Bayer) and DuPont (now Corteva). Critics argue that this compromises local seed sovereignty and marginalizes smallholder farmers.
- **Plant Breeders' Bill:** It is designed to establish a legal framework that grants intellectual property rights to breeders that develop new plant varieties. The contentious debate surrounding the Plant Breeders' Bill exemplifies AGRA's influence on regulatory frameworks. According to an independent expert evaluation, AGRA continued efforts to advance the bill through parliament despite resistance from farmer organizations concerned about potential monopolization of the seed market by international companies.

3.2.2.4 GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

AGRA's role in Ghana's agricultural landscape has not been without controversy:

- **Political Influence:** AGRA's initiatives have been impacted by political factors such as corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies. These challenges reflect the complexities of AGRA's relationship with the Ghanaian government and its ability to navigate governance issues.

- **Accountability and Perception:** AGRA positions itself as a “critical friend” to the government, aiming to hold it accountable. However, this dual role blurs boundaries and raises concerns about undue influence, particularly when AGRA-supported initiatives are questioned for their outcomes or transparency.

SUMMARY

AGRA’s involvement in Ghana illustrates a pattern of influencing policies that prioritize industrial farming and corporate interests over smallholder farmers and sustainable practices. While AGRA’s efforts have introduced new initiatives and frameworks, its role has also raised significant concerns about governance, accountability, and the long-term implications for food sovereignty and agroecology in Ghana.

3.2.3 THE CASE OF KENYA

AGRA's influence in Kenya spans multiple facets of agricultural policy and practice, with significant implications for smallholder farmers. While its initiatives aim to reform agricultural insurance, fertilizer regulations, and food reserve management, critics argue that AGRA's approach often prioritizes commercial interests over the needs of smallholder farmers.

3.2.3.1. POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE REFORMS

AGRA has played a central role in shaping Kenya's agricultural insurance policies:

- **Advocating for Agricultural Insurance Frameworks:** AGRA has promoted the development of comprehensive insurance policies, though these frameworks often appear to prioritize the interests of large agribusinesses and insurance companies, potentially sidelining smallholder farmers.
- **Collaboration with Stakeholders:** Through partnerships with government bodies and private sector entities, AGRA has supported policy development. While this collaboration has led to reforms, it raises questions about the alignment of AGRA's agenda with the needs of smallholder farmers versus corporate interests.

3.2.3.2. INFLUENCE ON INSURANCE PRODUCTS

AGRA's involvement extends to the design and promotion of agricultural insurance products:

- **Products for Large Farmers:** AGRA-supported insurance products often cater to larger commercial farmers capable of paying premiums, leaving smallholder farmers with limited access to affordable options.
- **Shaping Market Dynamics:** AGRA's relationships with major insurance providers may inadvertently stifle competition and innovation, limiting the emergence of farmer-friendly insurance products.

3.2.3.3. ACCESS TO FINANCE

AGRA has linked agricultural insurance with access to finance, which presents challenges for smallholder farmers:

- **Partnerships with Financial Institutions:** AGRA has facilitated collaborations between insurers and financial institutions, promoting products that may be costly or complex for small farmers to access.
- **Risk-Sharing Mechanisms:** While intended to expand credit access, these mechanisms often favour larger agricultural operations, marginalizing smallholders who are most in need of support.

3.2.3.4. FERTILIZER REFORMS

AGRA's involvement in Kenya's fertilizer sector has further entrenched commercial interests:

- **Regulatory Amendments:** AGRA collaborated with the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) to amend the Fertilizers and Animal Foodstuff Act of 2015. The primary amendment was the establishment of the Fertilizer and Animal Foodstuffs Board of Kenya, tasked with regulating various aspects of the fertilizer and animal foodstuffs industries like overseeing the production, manufacture, packaging, importation, and marketing of fertilizers and animal foodstuffs. Some critiques suggest that the Act may inadvertently favour larger agro-dealers by imposing regulatory requirements that smaller dealers might find challenging to meet, potentially leading to market consolidation.
- **Influencing the Agricultural Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy (ASTGS):** AGRA partnered with the government to shape the 10-year ASTGS. AGRA's involvement includes partnerships to support digital agricultural transformation and contributions to the strategy's development. The ASTGS promotes large-scale farming, synthetic fertilizers, and hybrid seeds.

3.2.3.5. DISMANTLING THE STRATEGIC FOOD RESERVE FUND

AGRA supported the government's dissolution of the Strategic Food Reserve Fund (SFR) and its replacement with the National Food Reserves managed by the National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB).

- **Concerns Over Efficiency:** The NCPB's controversial track record has raised fears about inefficiencies and potential influence from vested interests.

- **Market Instability:** Critics argue that dismantling the SFR, which previously stabilized food supplies and prices, could lead to greater market instability and food insecurity.

Summary

While AGRA's efforts in Kenya aim to transform agriculture and expand insurance access, its initiatives have drawn criticism for disproportionately benefiting larger commercial operations and private sector players. The marginalization of smallholder farmers and the prioritization of corporate interests underscore concerns about AGRA's role in shaping Kenya's agricultural future.

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3.2.4 THE CASE OF MALI

While AGRA's efforts in Kenya aim to transform agriculture and expand insurance access, its initiatives have drawn criticism for disproportionately benefiting larger commercial operations and private sector players. The marginalization of smallholder farmers and the prioritization of corporate interests underscore concerns about AGRA's role in shaping Kenya's agricultural future.

3.2.4.1. THE KOULIKORO CONSORTIUM

The Koulikoro Consortium, comprising two private seed companies, has been criticized for fostering anti-competitive practices. By coordinating sales and targeting specific areas, the consortium undermined fair competition, raising concerns about market monopolization.

3.2.4.2. CONCERNS OVER GRANT ALLOCATION

Faso Kaba, a small seed company with limited operational capacity, received a disproportionately large grant under AGRA's initiative. This allocation raised questions about fiduciary risks and whether the funding was appropriately distributed to maximize impact.

3.2.4.3. SUSTAINABILITY AND MARKET VIABILITY

Critics have pointed out the absence of realistic sustainability plans and comprehensive market analyses in the Koulikoro project. This lack of planning raises doubts about the project's ability to function effectively after AGRA's intervention ends, jeopardizing its long-term impact.

3.2.4.4. ROLE OF PRIVATE COMPANIES

Private seed companies involved in the project have been tasked with roles outside their core expertise, such as conducting market diagnostics and engaging stakeholders. Critics argue that these responsibilities distract from their primary focus on seed production, potentially compromising the project's efficiency and outcomes.

3.2.4.5. TRAINING AND MARKET ACCESS

Farmers participating in the project reported insufficient training in essential areas such as negotiation skills and building market linkages. This shortfall has led to concerns about their ability to access markets and sustain crop sales post-harvest, undermining the project's goals of improving livelihoods.

SUMMARY

AGRA's operations in Mali, while aiming to strengthen the agricultural sector, have been marred by issues related to market competition, funding allocation, and project sustainability. The involvement of private companies in non-core roles and inadequate farmer support further highlight the challenges in ensuring equitable and lasting benefits for all stakeholders.

3.3 LOCAL LEVEL POLICY INFLUENCE

3.3.1 THE CASE OF VIHIGA COUNTY, KENYA

AGRA's influence extends even to local governance, as demonstrated in Vihiga County, Kenya, where it has disrupted farmer-led efforts to develop agroecological alternatives to the Green Revolution model.

Kenya, home to AGRA's headquarters, faces significant agricultural challenges, including loss of agrobiodiversity, declining soil fertility, land degradation, poor dietary diversity, and the misuse of agrochemicals. These issues are particularly acute in the densely populated Western region, including Vihiga County, where years of maize monoculture and heavy chemical fertilizer use have degraded soils and weakened local food systems.

To counter these challenges, the Vihiga community, empowered by Kenya's decentralized agricultural policy-making framework, initiated a locally driven agroecology policy. This effort, led by Community Agroecology Promoters, aimed to improve soil health, enhance food quality, and combat invasive species by promoting organic farming and regenerative agricultural practices.

The Vihiga County Agroecology Policy set clear goals for sustainable food systems, as reflected in its statement: *"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."*

However, after two years of dedicated local work, AGRA's sudden involvement as a sponsor has raised concerns about the derailment or dilution of this grassroots initiative.

3.3.1.1 AGRA'S INFLUENCE IN VIHIGA COUNTY

AGRA's late entry into Vihiga's agroecology policy-making process, marked by strategic funding and support for capacity-building initiatives, has caused alarm among local farmers and advocates of sustainable agriculture. By funding capacity-building initiatives and engaging key county officials, AGRA has managed to assert influence over the process.

Emergence of AGRA's Affiliates:

Ferdinand Wafula of Bio Gardening Innovations (BIOGI), a central proponent of agroecology in the region, expressed surprise at the inclusion of the Food and Land Use Coalition (FOLU), an AGRA affiliate, as a stakeholder late in the policy preparation stage.

"We noticed a shift in narrative and the introduction of terminology not originally part of the Agroecology Policy, such as 'climate-smart agri-food systems,' which raises concerns about what this entails," Wafula stated.

Shift in Policy Language:

A senior official highlighted regenerative agriculture as part of the county's agroecology strategy but echoed AGRA's language by mentioning "climate-smart activities." This term, often associated with high-input agriculture, raises scepticism about the county's commitment to true agroecology.

This shift has created doubts among stakeholders about whether the policy's original vision will be upheld.

3.3.1.2 AGRA'S FINANCIAL INFLUENCE

AGRA has leveraged its financial resources to influence the Vihiga agroecological policy-making process:

Workshops and Capacity Building: AGRA has facilitated workshops, provided capacity-building initiatives for county staff, and funded meetings with Members of the County Assembly (MCAs).

Public Participation: AGRA has committed to funding publicity materials for the public participation phase, further embedding its presence in the process.

Critics worry that AGRA's financial support could undermine the policy's agroecological foundations.

“While I am yet to see any technical input from AGRA, we fear that AGRA might later influence the implementation strategy. It is at this stage when they will introduce their interests,” said one informant.

3.3.1.3 CALLS FOR SAFEGUARDING AGROECOLOGY

Pro-agroecology organizations are advocating for stronger safeguards to protect future policy-making processes from being co-opted by Green Revolution interests. Wafula of BIOGI emphasized the need for secure funding to ensure independence:

“He who pays the piper calls the tune. We must ring-fence the process by setting the rules of engagement from the beginning of future agroecology policy efforts.”

SUMMARY

AGRA’s involvement in Vihiga County illustrates how financial influence and strategic positioning can disrupt locally driven agroecological initiatives. By introducing industrial agriculture concepts like “climate-smart agriculture” into the policy language, AGRA risks diluting the original goals of the Vihiga County Agroecology Policy. This case underscores the need for robust safeguards to protect agroecology initiatives from being co-opted by external actors with conflicting agendas.

4.1 CONCLUSIONS

AGRA's influence on African agricultural policies poses significant risks to food sovereignty, democratic governance, and sustainable development. Through its policy-influencing work, AGRA has advanced a corporate-driven agenda that marginalizes smallholder farmers and agroecological approaches.

1. **Undue Policy Influence:** AGRA's strategy of embedding consultants within government ministries and influencing policy development has frequently bypassed democratic processes, creating environments that favour corporate-driven agricultural models over farmer-led, sustainable alternatives. This undermines food sovereignty and agroecological practices at local, national, and continental levels.
2. **Marginalization of Agroecology:** AGRA's focus on hybrid and genetically modified seeds, synthetic fertilizers, and monocropping has marginalized agroecological approaches, which prioritize biodiversity, soil health, and smallholder resilience. This trend raises concerns about long-term environmental sustainability and food security.
3. **Transparency and Accountability Deficits:** The lack of transparency in AGRA's interventions—such as its influence over Zambia's Comprehensive Agriculture Transformation Support Programme (CATSP) and Vihiga County's agroecology policy—highlights the risks of external actors dictating policies without adequate public scrutiny or stakeholder engagement.
4. **Corporate-Driven Agriculture:** AGRA's prioritization of large-scale, export-oriented agriculture has exacerbated vulnerabilities among smallholder farmers, often sidelining local food systems and indigenous knowledge in favour of commercial farming and private-sector interests.
5. **Broader Regional and Continental Impact:** AGRA's influence extends beyond individual countries, shaping continental frameworks like the Post-Malabo process to align with industrial agricultural models. This strategy risks further entrenching Africa's dependence on external inputs and multinational corporations.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Promote Agroecological Frameworks:** AGRA's influence extends beyond individual countries, shaping continental frameworks like the Post-Malabo process to align with industrial agricultural models. This strategy risks further entrenching Africa's dependence on external inputs and multinational corporations.
- 2. Enhance Policy Transparency:** Establish mechanisms for transparent policymaking, including public consultations, independent evaluations, and oversight bodies, to prevent undue influence from external actors like AGRA.
- 3. Strengthen Local Governance:** Support capacity-building initiatives for local governments and civil society organizations to safeguard grassroots agroecological initiatives from co-option by corporate-driven agendas.
- 4. Safeguard Smallholder Interests:** Advocate for policies that protect smallholder farmers, emphasizing biodiversity, soil health, and resilience to climate change. Reject policies that promote monocropping at the expense of local food systems.
- 5. Develop Regional Advocacy Campaigns:** Collaborate with regional bodies, such as COMESA and the African Union, to champion agroecology and resist policy harmonization efforts that disproportionately favour corporate interests.
- 6. Increase Accountability for External Actors:** Require external actors, including AGRA, to adhere to principles of accountability and transparency, with mandatory reporting on their involvement in policy processes and outcomes.
- 7. Foster Cross-Sectoral Partnerships:** Build alliances with farmer organizations, academic institutions, and advocacy groups to generate evidence-based alternatives to the Green Revolution model and amplify the voices of smallholder farmers and agroecology proponents.
- 8. Monitor and Counter Corporate Influence:** Establish monitoring frameworks to track and counteract corporate influence in policy spaces, ensuring that the interests of local communities and sustainable agriculture are safeguarded.

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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.



WHO IS AFSA?

AFSA brings small-scale farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, faith groups, consumers, youth and activists from across the continent of Africa to create a united and louder voice for food sovereignty.

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