

Open Letter: Post-Olympic 'Long-term Solutions' to Hunger very Short-Sighted

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Those at the top (world-famous athletes, diplomats and prime ministers) remain myopic about the causes of African hunger, for they continue to listen to those who seek corporate profit, rather than hearing the organized, creative smallholder farmers. The last day of the 2012 Summer Olympics, just before the closing ceremony, Prime Minister David Cameron held a 'hunger summit' at #10 Downing Street, co-hosted by Brazil's (the next summer Olympic venue) Vice President, Michel Temer. Their goal was to shine the Olympic spotlight on the 20 million malnourished children around the world, many residing in countries of Olympic champions, such as Mo Farah (5,000 and 10,000 m UK gold medalist), originally from Somalia, who attended the summit. The session was also to announce Cameron's intention to focus on world hunger during his 2013 presidency of the G-8.

This noble goal, especially recognizing the gross inequality gap between many world class athletes and their own people, was obscured, however, by the fact that the corporations (behind the G-8 and financing the Olympics) seeming to promote cures to world hunger are the cause of it. A BBC announcement of the hunger summit linked it to a 'sustained green revolution', and the Cameron initiative pledges to work with the Gates

Foundation in promoting 'drought resistant and vitamin enriched crops'. This government initiative will also partner with the UK firms, Unilever, Syngenta and GSK. (DFID, 2012: 1)

The current 'green revolution' for Africa (promoted by the Gates Foundation's Alliance for a Green Revolution for Africa-AGRA) will enrich the corporate food cartels, for they seek to link African food production and consumption to the global market, or as they say, to the global 'food value chain'. The increased yields will come from 'monoculture within monoculture' (only 1-2 varieties of 1-2 grains) grown with the seeds, pesticides and fertilizers provided by the cartels. Only 4-5 corporations control the global market for each of the three inputs. African farmers will provide their land, water and labor, while they lose control over vital inputs.

During the summer Olympics, for example, Pioneer Seed (DuPont) won a South African legal case to buy out Pannar Seed, the largest local seed company in all Southern Africa. The organized farmers continue to appeal in the courts, for if allowed, South Africa will only control about 5 percent of its own seed; the genetic wealth farmers bred over centuries, now in Pannar seed banks, will become the private property of a single American corporation. And seed prices will rise.

Not content to chain African food producers to the global market, a related goal is to link African urban consumers, those with a bit of discretionary cash, to the global food retail market. Tyson Foods is trying to take over the southern African poultry market, via South Africa. WalMart is making its entry into South Africa, in spite of much civic opposition. Fast food chicken and chips, dripping with fat-salt, are the urban teenagers' top choice. And obesity of young people has become an African health issue.

These two global agendas, chaining African food production and consumption to the global market, will destroy African smallholders who source most of their inputs locally and deliver food to local

markets. Those of us in the North need to ask questions: why are we organizing to source food from local farmers, buying locally, while such markets in Africa are called 'subsistence'? Why is our approach 'upscale' and 'environmentally friendly', while the very same approach in Africa is labeled 'backward'? How about the global cartels financing African farmers to visit USA farmers and show us how to do it better?

This Olympic summit resonates because African food production does need assistance. The smallholders can produce more, but they need fair credit schemes, decent roads, warehouses, and agricultural extension that honor the wealth of their diverse ecological zones, rather than trying to plough it under into monoculture. Africans are organizing to pursue these goals. Outsiders could help.

What those of us in the North could do is to change our own country's agricultural policies:

- a) Expose and reduce the systematic removal of capital from the African continent, via theft of minerals, of germplasm (seed), and other illicit removals. More than US\$700 billion left Africa 1970-2008: "In other words, the rest of the world owes more to these African countries than they owe to the rest of the world." (Ndikumana and Boyce, 2011: ii; see Kar and Freita, 2011);
- b) Disband European and American public subsidies of monoculture by agribusiness;
- c) End the fossil-fuel addiction of industrial agriculture, which accounts for 35-40 percent of greenhouse gas emissions;
- d) Break up seed cartels, using anti-trust laws, for the monopolies they are; just a few control the biodiversity of our future food.

Let's end African hunger by listening to African farmers, not broadcasting the tune of global corporations who control the global 'food value chain'.

References

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