

Assignment 5

The New Green Revolution: Positive or Negative?

With the Rockefeller and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations' announcement of a new Green Revolution, to benefit Africa specifically, one must seriously consider the possible outcomes. Past initiatives demonstrate the two groups' sincerity towards alleviating poverty, though good intentions can only do so much. As Joseph Stiglitz pointed out, the World Bank and IMF truly believed their programs would help developing nations, with often disastrous results. To end hunger above all, as this initiative aims to do, first, one can examine the impacts of the original Green Revolution on developing nations in Latin America and Asia, to predict whether the updated version will succeed. Second, Peter Rosset's *World Hunger* and *Food is Different* expose common misconceptions about hunger today, which manifest themselves in the new Green Revolution plan.

The Gates and Rockefeller Foundations cite the original revolution as a model to follow, writing "The results were as massive as they were unprecedented" (*Africa's Turn* 1). However, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations,

the Green Revolution as a development approach has not necessarily translated into benefits for the lower strata of the rural poor in terms of greater food security or greater economic opportunity and well-being

(<http://www.fao.org/FOCUS/E/Women/green-e.htm>). The original revolution led to an increased gulf between the rich and poor in developing nations. One reason stems from the increased use of mechanized technology, which replaces poor laborers who work for little, with tractors and other machinery. Not only do the workers lose a job, but the tractor owners go into debt to purchase their new technology, as well as seeds and fertilizers, at the risk of going bankrupt. In developing nations with no government safety nets, this results in disaster. The Green Revolution exhibited positives and negatives, and the two foundations must recognize the latter more fully.

"Over the course of nearly four decades, beginning in the 1940s, annual crop yields surged in poor countries around the world" (*Africa's Turn* 1). Many critics concede that the Green Revolution, with its packages implemented fully, did increase production. However, Peter Rosset writes that "even most 'hungry countries' have

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enough food for all their people right now” (*World Hunger* 9). Since the world, as he notes, grows more than enough food to feed its people, what purpose does a new Green Revolution serve? Increasing yields will not increase farmers’ livelihoods, as more production exacerbates the current problem of very low food prices (*Food is Different*). Farmers in developing nations may as well stick to subsistence farming of local crops if they have land, so they will not starve or have to migrate to urban slums in search of work. The Rockefeller and Gates Foundations’ new Green Revolution fails to recognize falsehoods surrounding world hunger in relation to current food supplies, as explained by Rosset in his two books.

Going forward, the two institutions have a great opportunity to alleviate hunger. However, they should refocus their efforts to achieve this noble goal. First they must revisit the original Green Revolution, and look carefully at its causes. The Rockefeller and Gates Foundations sincerely believe they can benefit Africa’s people, but they must proceed without any outside agendas. This means helping them in the best way possible, regardless of the interests of the US government, agribusiness firms like Cargill and Monsanto, and world bodies like the World Bank and IMF. Looking at research by scholars like Rosset, they can work to solve problems underlying food insecurity like artificially low world food prices. Overall, the foundations must take a holistic and careful approach, because while failure on their end means no return on their investment, however noble, for poor Africans it can mean worsening poverty and despair.