

Interview with Gabriel S. Manyangadze,

Head of Food and Climate Justice Programs

at the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI)

Interview by Éric Tariant

"The Gates Foundation must stop pushing for laws that criminalize the poorest people."

nexus What do you hold against the Gates Foundation?

Gabriel S. Manyangadze: We

We are criticized for introducing industrial agriculture to Africa and for bringing commercial seeds to our continent and spreading them, seeds that are systematically associated with artificial fertilizers and pesticides. African plant and animal biodiversity, which is among the most important in the world, has suffered particularly from the introduction of these chemicals into the environment. Insect and bee populations have been severely affected.

In addition, the Gates Foundation, through AGRA, is pressuring governments to adopt new agricultural policies that criminalize the exchange of traditional seeds that are not certified or listed in the official catalog. This is particularly the case in Malawi, Ghana, and Kenya. In these countries, economic interests have succeeded in passing laws that prohibit the use of farm-saved seeds and require the purchase of commercial seeds. However, rural populations, who are often very poor, cannot afford to buy these seeds. They have been producing and exchanging their own seeds since time immemorial.

This is now prohibited by laws stipulating that only registered seeds may be cultivated and sold. We denounce the obligation imposed on rural populations to purchase these

commercial seeds. These laws, which criminalize the ancestral right to produce and reuse one's own seeds, deprive farmers of the means to feed themselves. Traditional seeds are the first link in the food chain and the ultimate symbol of our food security. For thousands of years, farmers have worked with nature to select thousands of varieties of plant seeds adapted to the diversity of our climates and cultures. They save the best of these to replant the following season.

In your open letter, you also write that soil fertility has declined since the introduction of the green revolution in Africa...

We have indeed observed that it has become increasingly difficult to grow seeds and obtain crops in soils that have become sterile due to the chemical fertilizers that have been spread on them. It is usually governments that purchase these fertilizers and then distribute them to farmers. Many farming families cannot afford to buy these products, fertilizers, and pesticides, which are far too expensive for them. The laws passed that prohibit them from feeding themselves and require them to buy seeds are responsible for an increase in the number of households suffering from hunger.

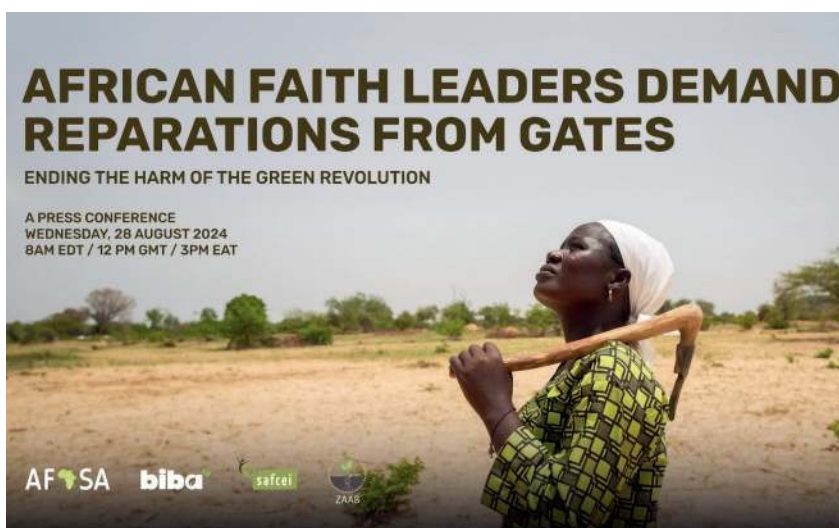
What is your view on the Gates Foundation's lobbying efforts

by the Gates Foundation in favor of introducing GMOs in Africa? More and more agricultural scientists and agricultural economics trainers are coming out in favor of GMOs. African governments are facing intense pressure—particularly from seed companies—which they are finding difficult to resist. For the moment, GMOs are mainly used and consumed in South Africa. More and more NGOs and farmers want to ban them from their countries. This is because GMOs deprive Africans of their food sovereignty. They make them dependent on seeds from foreign countries, in an international context where agricultural prices are highly volatile.

How are Africans resisting this philanthrocapitalism?

We have decided, as far as we are concerned, to contact the Gates Foundation directly to explain the deplorable and damaging our part, to contact the Gates Foundation directly to explain the deplorable and damaging impact of its actions in Africa on farmers and the environment. We criticize it for taking no account of poor populations, who must be able to continue practicing agroecology to feed themselves.

We have asked it to stop pushing for laws that criminalize the poorest. We are convinced that agroecology will make farmers more resilient to climate change and the crises that lie ahead. Agroecology will enable them to maintain their food sovereignty. •



Poster for the press conference held on August 28, 2024, to launch the open letter published by SAFCEI, demanding reparations from the Gates Foundation for the considerable damage caused to African food systems [<https://urls.fr/TO31g0>].

Bill Gates. SAFCEI is also demanding reparations from the Gates Foundation. (See the interview with Gabriel S. Manyangadze, SAFCEI's food and climate justice program manager, opposite.)

"The failure of the agricultural policies initiated in Africa by the Gates Foundation is such that the very people it is supposed to help are asking it to stop its programs and compensate them for the problems it has caused, ana-

"One Agriculture" [...] is the most dangerous aspect of Bill Gates' approach, because it involves imposing a single agricultural model everywhere on the planet."

Lionel Astruc, journalist

Tim Schwab explains. *Why doesn't Bill Gates listen to what these organizations and farmers are telling him and rethink his approach? Because he is not a philanthropist and has no humanitarian goals. He is an oligarch who knows nothing about Africa, let alone agriculture. He is an engineer from Seattle who dreams only of setting up*

monopolies. His agricultural policies are a form of disguised colonization," the author continues.

What's more, the *top-down* policies designed and implemented at the initiative of the Gates Foundation, whose power exceeds that of many states, are not subject to any democratic control. This "philanthropic" organization, headquartered in Seattle, is not accountable for its programs and policies to the public institutions it supports or the populations it affects. *"Worse still, the Foundation indirectly buys the silence of academics, NGOs, and the media, who would otherwise be in a position to condemn certain aspects of its actions,"* points out Lionel Astruc. Vandana Shiva does not hesitate to denounce and condemn the billionaire's aims. *"One Agriculture [...] is the most dangerous aspect of Bill Gates' approach, because it involves imposing a single agricultural model across the planet. [...] A single, unique form of agriculture based on a single pillar: biotechnology and the green revolution. This is unprecedented,"* insists the activist. •

Author's note

We sent interview requests to the Gates Foundation and AGRA. We did not receive any response from either organization.

> Further reading

- Schwab, Tim, *The Bill Gates Problem – Reckoning with the Myth of the Good Billionaire*, Penguin Group, 2023.
- Astruc Lionel, *L'Art de la fausse générosité – La Fondation Bill et Melinda Gates (The Art of False Generosity – The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation)*, Actes Sud, 2019.
- The NGO Grain has published two reports on the Gates Foundation, both available on its website [www.grain.org]: "How does the Gates Foundation spend its money to feed the world?" (2014) [<https://urls.fr/uD3ABv>] and "How the Gates Foundation is pushing the food system in the wrong direction" (2021) [<https://urls.fr/levVbH>].
- In August 2024, the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa website: [<https://afsafira.org>]) published a entitled "<https://urls.fr/N-P6wd>."
- A wealth of information about the Gates Foundation is available on the U.S. Right to Know website [<https://usrtk.org>].
- And on the website of AGRA Watch [<https://cagj.org/agrawatch/>], a Seattle-based association that monitors the Gates Foundation's agricultural programs in Africa, which are developed there by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA).

Notes

1. "Malawi Agro-Dealer Strengthening Program, Interim Evaluation Phase 1 Report," Center for Agricultural Research and Development (CARD), Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) [<https://www.luanar.ac.mw>], 2009, in "The hunger games – How DFID support for agribusiness is fuelling poverty in Africa" [<https://urls.fr/2qeLNC>].
2. Open letter "African Faith Leaders Demand Reparations from the Gates Foundation to End the Harm of the Green Revolution" (*African religious leaders demand reparations from the Gates Foundation to end the damage caused by the green revolution*) [<https://urls.fr/kieO1P>].