

Gated Development

Is the Gates Foundation always a force for good?



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About Global Justice Now

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Contents

Foreword	4
Introduction	6
1. Influencing global policies	10
2. Promoting corporate interests	20
3. Supporting industrial agriculture	26
4. Pushing privatisation	34
Recommendations	37
References	38

Foreword

Every January, Bill Gates sets out his vision for a better world and the role the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation can play in achieving this in an annual letter to us all. With assets of \$43.5 billion, the foundation is the largest charitable foundation in the world. It is arguably the most influential actor on issues of global health and agriculture, and distributes more aid for global health than any government.

This influence has earned the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation a place in the regular reporting of aid to the global south, as compiled by the OECD. But this has not been matched with the corresponding accountability and scrutiny to the public that we have in aid programmes run by governments. At present, the foundation is obliged to only report its high level financial figures to the US government and its programmes are not subject to independent or public evaluation.

Global Justice Now has a strong track record in holding the UK government to account on how UK aid is spent to ensure that it reaches the people who really need it and makes a long term difference to levels of poverty and inequality.

In 1994, we took the UK government to court, and won, over its use of aid to fund a hydroelectric dam in Malaysia, in return for £1 billion in British arms sales to the Malaysian government, on the grounds that this was not going to benefit the Malaysian people. Today, we are campaigning to stop aid funding the privatisation of Nigeria's electricity system and the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition because neither of these programmes are effectively reducing poverty and inequality in the global south. Moreover, the UK's aid programme is increasingly prioritising the interests of big business instead of tackling the root causes of inequality and poverty.

Although business is playing an ever greater role in international development, in a recent review of the relationship between business and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the Independent Commission for Aid Impact is highly critical of how this is failing to benefit people living in poverty.ⁱ

Gated Development demonstrates that the trend to involve business in addressing poverty and inequality is central to the priorities and funding of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. We argue that this is far from a neutral charitable strategy but instead an ideological commitment to promote neoliberal economic policies and corporate globalisation. Big business is directly benefitting, in particular in the fields of agriculture and health, as a result of the foundation's activities, despite evidence to show that business solutions are not the most effective.

For the foundation in particular, there is an overt focus on technological solutions to poverty. While technology should have a role in addressing poverty and inequality, long term solutions require social and economic justice. This cannot be given by donors in the form of a climate resilient crop or cheaper smartphone, but must be about systemic social, economic and political change – issues not represented in the foundation's funding priorities.

Perhaps what is most striking about the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is that despite its aggressive corporate strategy and extraordinary influence across governments, academics and the media, there is an absence of critical voices. Global Justice Now is concerned that the foundation's influence is so pervasive that many actors in international development, which would otherwise critique the policy and practice of the foundation, are unable to speak out independently as a result of its funding and patronage.

i. Independent Commission for Aid Impact, Business in Development 2015 <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/report/business-in-development/>

Specifically, we call on the OECD to undertake an independent international review and evaluation of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; and the UK's International Development Select Committee to conduct an inquiry into the relationship between DFID and the foundation and the impact and effectiveness of any joint activity in addressing poverty and inequality.

At a time when governments are under pressure from the public to reduce their aid expenditure and philanthropic foundations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, are more influential than ever, we must ensure that global efforts to address poverty and inequality are effective, long term and sustainable. Big business cannot be the solution to poverty and inequality because the relentless pursuit of profit is incompatible with securing social and economic justice for all.

Polly Jones

**Head of Campaigns and Policy
Global Justice Now**

Introduction

“They seriously and very sentimentally set themselves to the task of remedying the evils that they see in poverty, but their remedies do not cure the disease: they merely prolong it... the proper aim is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible.”¹

Oscar Wilde on philanthropists

For most of the last 20 years, Bill Gates has been the richest person on earth, with a reported personal wealth of \$79.2 billion.² His charitable organisation – the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) – is the world’s largest, with an asset endowment of a massive \$43.5 billion. The BMGF is funding numerous projects and organisations in international development and has been widely praised for injecting money and vigour into policy debates and research.

To say that the BMGF has become an important actor in international development would be an understatement. When it comes to global health and agriculture policies, two of its key grant areas, the BMGF has become probably the most influential actor in the world. It is also likely that Bill Gates, who has regular access to world leaders and is in effect personally bankrolling hundreds of universities, international organisations, NGOs and media outlets, has become the single most influential voice in international development.

Closer examination of the BMGF is critical given that its influence is vast, indeed greater than most donor governments. The BMGF provides more aid to global health than any country donor and is the fifth largest donor to agriculture in developing countries. In 2013, only 11 countries spent more on aid than the BMGF, making it the world’s 12th largest donor. The Gates Foundation has become a bigger donor than countries such as Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Ireland and Italy.³

But the BMGF’s increasing global influence is not being subjected to democratic scrutiny. Unlike governments, which are formally accountable to their electorates, the BMGF is a private US foundation, and remains unaccountable to public bodies (except for tax reporting purposes). Even worse, the BMGF appears to have bought the silence of academics, NGOs and the media who might otherwise be expected to criticise aspects of the foundation’s work.

This would not be so bad if the foundation programmes were truly focused on its proclaimed goals of improving people's health and eradicating hunger and poverty.⁴ But this report argues that the BMGF's high-profile influence is increasingly problematic. Indeed, the evidence suggests that the BMGF's programmes are – overall – detrimental to promoting economic development and global justice. The world is being sold a myth that private philanthropy holds many of the solutions to the world's problems, when in fact it is pushing the world in many wrong directions. The BMGF is being allowed to speak too loudly, and too many actors in international development are falling into line with the foundation's misguided priorities.

Analysis of the BMGF's programmes shows that the foundation, whose senior staff is overwhelmingly drawn from corporate America, is promoting multinational corporate interests at the expense of social and economic justice. Its strategy is deepening – and is intended to deepen – the role of multinational companies in global health and agriculture especially, even though these corporations are responsible for much of the poverty and injustice that already plagues the global south. Indeed, much of the money the BMGF has to spend derives from investments in some of the world's biggest and most controversial companies; thus the BMGF's ongoing work significantly depends on the ongoing profitability of corporate America, something which is not easy to square with genuinely realising social and economic justice in the global south.

In addition, the foundation has become the world's leading funder of research into the genetic modification (GM) of crops and is funding organisations to push GM crops across Africa and to change national legislation on this issue, in the face of often considerable opposition. It is also leading the push for massive increases in the use of chemicals by African farmers and is promoting the

privatisation of seed production to benefit mainly US and European agribusiness. These priorities are a direct challenge to the increasingly popular movements in support of food sovereignty and agroecological farming in Africa. Furthermore, the foundation is also using its funds to promote the increasing privatisation of health services in developing countries.

The BMGF's programme is not a neutral, charitable strategy for which the world should be thankful that a rich man is deciding to spend his money on good causes. Analysis of the foundation's programmes shows that it has an agenda – it is a specific ideological strategy that promotes neo-liberal economic policies, corporate globalisation, the technology this brings, and a long outdated view of the centrality of 'aid' in helping the 'poor'.

The official aid system is failing to hold the Gates Foundation to account for its activities. Indeed, official donors have bought into the BMGF's agenda, partly since many – notably the UK and US – share the BMGF's ideological agenda, and partly because the foundation is injecting new funds into areas where donors are reducing theirs. But across Africa and in other parts of the global south, people are calling not for the BMGF's aid but for promoting rights and justice. This would address the real causes of their lack of resources and power – including the excessive power of corporations, the drainage of wealth through unfair tax policies and tax havens, unresponsive political systems, and climate change – policies which are either largely or completely off the BMGF's agenda.

The Gates Foundation

The BMGF gave out \$3.9 billion in grants in 2014 and has spent \$23.9 billion since its inception in 2000.⁵ It supports work in more than 100 countries⁶ and its website lists 6,210 grants during 2010-14.⁷ The BMGF states:

“Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people’s health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people – especially those with the fewest resources – have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life”.⁸

We are not suggesting that Bill Gates is insincere in his desire to help poor people and developing countries. Neither are we suggesting that some BMGF-funded projects are not positive; many are. A 2009 editorial in the medical journal *The Lancet* praised the BMGF for giving:

“a massive boost to global health funding . . . The Foundation has challenged the world to think big and to be more ambitious about what can be done to save lives in low-income settings. The Foundation has added renewed dynamism, credibility, and attractiveness to global health (as a cause)”.⁹

Many other projects that the BMGF funds are also important, not least NGO and academic policy and advocacy work that might otherwise not be promoted all due to lack of funds.

However, these individual projects mask the broader picture. In what follows, we outline key ways in which the BMGF’s grants are increasingly problematic. We believe these issues are serious and that it is time for the BMGF to be subject to proper democratic oversight and public scrutiny, and for its influence to be challenged.

Bill Gates’ wealth: Is it his to give away?

Bill Gates’ personal wealth of \$78.9 billion is 30 million times greater than the average wealth of the poorest 3.2 billion adults in the world.¹⁰ Gates is actually richer than 45 sub-Saharan African countries – only three on the whole continent has a higher gross domestic product than Gates’ own holdings.¹¹

There is something wrong when any individual is allowed to accrue such a vast fortune while billions languish in poverty. Gates is a beneficiary of a global economic system that has allowed one per cent of the world’s people to own almost half (48 per cent) of the world’s wealth while the poorest half of the world’s population (3.5 billion people) owns only as much as the richest 80 individuals in the world.¹²

Despite the impression that Bill Gates is ‘giving away’ his fortune to charity, his estimated net worth is constantly increasing. According to *Forbes*, Gates’ personal wealth has risen from \$56 billion in 2011 to \$78.9 billion in 2015 – an increase of \$23 billion in four years, roughly the same amount of money that the BMGF has disbursed since its inception.¹³ In January 2014, the *Guardian* reported that a 40 per cent increase in Microsoft shares boosted Bill Gates’ fortune by \$15.8 billion in 2013.¹⁴ That same year, the BMGF gave out grants worth \$3.6 billion.¹⁵

Continued...

Microsoft and tax avoidance

Bill Gates' wealth comes primarily from Microsoft, the computer software company which he founded with Paul Allen in 1975. In 2008, Gates stopped working full-time for Microsoft to concentrate on the foundation.¹⁶ However, Gates served as chairman of the board until February 2014, continues to serve on Microsoft's Board of Directors and remains an advisor on key development projects.¹⁷ Indeed, Gates reportedly now spends a third of his time working at Microsoft.¹⁸ He owns about 4.5 per cent of the company and is still the largest individual shareholder.¹⁹

Prominent UK tax adviser, the accountant Richard Murphy has called Microsoft 'just a giant tax planning exercise'.²⁰ Indeed, many stories on Microsoft's tax avoidance have been reported since 2005.²¹ In August 2014, for example, it was reported that Microsoft was sitting on almost \$29.6 billion it would owe in US taxes if it repatriated the \$92.9 billion of earnings it was keeping offshore. A 2012 US Senate found that the company was using offshore subsidiaries to substantially reduce its tax bills, describing Microsoft's "complex web of interrelated foreign entities to facilitate international sales and reduce US and foreign tax". The report noted that despite the company undertaking most of its research in the US and generating US tax credits, profit rights to the intellectual property were largely located in foreign tax havens. This meant that:

"Microsoft was able to shift offshore nearly \$21 billion (in a 3-year period), or almost half of its U.S. retail sales net revenue, saving up to \$4.5 billion in taxes on goods sold in the United States, or just over \$4 million in U.S. taxes each day".²²

The \$4.5 billion in taxes lost to the US Treasury each year is greater than the BMGF's annual global spending. Furthermore, Microsoft's value as a company has undoubtedly been inflated by its tax planning, meaning that more of Gates' philanthropy has been paid for by the US Exchequer, thus US taxpayers.²³

In the UK, a *Sunday Times* investigation found that Microsoft's channelling of online payments for sales of its new Windows 8 operating system to Luxembourg avoided UK corporation tax on more than £1.7 billion of revenue every year.²⁴ Richard Murphy estimates annual corporation tax losses of £103 million based on this revenue.²⁵ *This is likely to be greater than the amount spent by the BMGF on UK organisations.²⁶*

Apple and General Electric are the only US-based companies that have more money offshore than Microsoft, according to data compiled by Citizens for Tax Justice. Microsoft's use of offshore subsidiaries has exploded in recent years, and the amount of Microsoft earnings shifted offshore has jumped 516 per cent since 2008, according to its filings with the US Securities and Exchange Commission.²⁷

Gates is reported as seeing nothing wrong in complex tax avoidance schemes while telling nations how to spend their revenues and defending Microsoft's tax strategy.²⁸ Moreover, Microsoft is part of lobbying to curb clamping down on tax avoidance. In January 2015, for example, lobby groups representing the US technology industry, including Microsoft, Apple and Google, "launched a fierce attack on global plans to stamp out artificial corporate structures used to avoid tax". In response to a G20-led programme of international tax reform, the lobbyists condemned the plans as riddled with "fundamental flaws" and said parts "must be rejected". It claimed the proposed reforms go too far, would be too costly and would lead to confusion and dispute.²⁹

1. Influencing global policies

The evidence suggests that the Gates Foundation has bought itself a role in a number of highly influential global organisations. The vast sums of money given by the BMGF are allowing it to operate a global patronage system whereby it is in effect buying the loyalty of influential actors. At the same time, criticism of the foundation is muted, and many actors receiving BMGF funding, who might otherwise be expected to criticise it, are being largely silent.

This situation is clearly a threat to global democratic decision-making. The fact that a private funder occupies these influential positions is an indictment of the world's public aid system and of governments which should be holding the BMGF to account. Moreover, the effect is that public policy-making is being skewed towards promoting private, corporate interests.

The foundation has excessive global influence

The BMGF's influence is especially great in global agriculture and health where it is funding a raft of scientists, governments, corporations, NGOs and media, giving it considerable leverage in shaping global policy priorities.

In health, the BMGF has been the largest or second largest contributor to the **World Health Organisation's** budget in recent years. The BMGF provided 11 per cent of the WHO's entire budget in 2015,³⁰ which is 14 times greater than the UK government's contribution. The foundation has also become the world's largest funder of health research for communicable diseases, such as TB, malaria and HIV- financing more than the WHO itself.³¹

The BMGF is also the main player in several influential global public-private health partnerships. Seed money from the foundation launched the **Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation** (GAVI) in 1999³², on which board the foundation sits as one of four permanent members (along with WHO, UNICEF and the World Bank)³³. The BMGF has given \$2.5 billion to the GAVI Alliance since 2000.³⁴

The BMGF has provided \$1.4 billion to the **Global Fund to Fight HIV/Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria**, on which board it sits.³⁵ The BMGF also sits on the board of the **H8**, a self-appointed group of eight health-related organisations (together with WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNAIDS, the Global Fund, and GAVI) created in 2007 to address global health-related goals.³⁶ In addition, it has been involved in setting the health agenda for the self-appointed **G8** group of states.³⁷

As regards agriculture, the BMGF has to date spent \$2 billion, primarily in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.³⁸ It is the world's fifth largest donor to agriculture, spending \$389 million in 2013; only Germany, Japan, Norway and the US have larger bilateral aid programmes to agriculture.³⁹ In Africa, it established and is bankrolling the **Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa** (AGRA), which has become arguably the most influential agriculture body in the continent (see section 3).

With funding comes influence. The BBC has called Bill Gates "the single most influential voice in global health".⁴⁰ The *Guardian* has described Sam Dryden, the BMGF's head of agriculture, as "possibly the most powerful figure in world agriculture today... No government minister, banker, civil servant or corporation wields such influence or has so few political restrictions."⁴¹

Indeed, the foundation has gained access to the highest levels of decision-making in the UN and several international organisations. For example, the Gates family have gained considerable personal access to senior levels of the **World Health Organisation**. In 2014, the Peoples Health Movement wrote to the WHO to protest against the latter's decision to invite Melinda Gates as the keynote speaker at the World Health Assembly, the decision-making body of WHO. This was the third time in the last 10 years that a representative from the BMGF or family had been an invited speaker at the assembly.⁴² In May 2011, it was reported that "WHO Director-General and Bill Gates convene an urgent meeting on polio eradication", and that the WHO's



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Bill Clinton, Bill Gates, Thabo Mbeki, Tony Blair, Bono and Olusegun Obasanjo at the World Economic Forum, 2005

Director-General Dr Margaret Chan and Bill Gates, “met today with Ministers of Health of polio-infected countries and international development agencies, to discuss urgent steps needed to eradicate polio rapidly and efficiently”.⁴³ It is inconceivable that Gates would be able to play this role if his foundation were not bankrolling the organisation.

In February 2012, the Gates Foundation announced it was giving \$200 million to the **International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)**, one of the three Rome-based agricultural organisations of the UN. On the day of the announcement, Bill Gates had also been invited to speak at IFAD’s Governing Council. In his speech, Gates implored countries to bring “agricultural science and technology to poor farmers”, for which “the real expertise lies with private sector companies”. This was a reference to GM and biotechnology, areas

strongly prioritised by the foundation (see section 3).⁴⁴ Indeed, the ‘statement of intent’ which the BMGF and IFAD jointly signed called for the two to “support generation (sic) of new technologies to create the possibility of sustainable intensification of agriculture”.⁴⁵ IFAD noted that the two organisations were “coordinating investments” in areas such as agricultural research.⁴⁶

A sign that IFAD appears to have adopted the BMGF’s technology agenda came in an article by IFAD’s Associate Vice-President Kevin Cleaver, who wrote at the same time as the Gates’ funding announcement:

“Technology is key. The simplest advances – more robust seeds, or even better ploughs and hoes – can tilt the scales toward food security and poverty reduction. We simply have to find out what works and then replicate it feverishly”.⁴⁷

This is a bizarrely and worryingly simplistic view of agricultural development from a leading international agency – if the solution were simply to invent technology and get it to farmers, world hunger would have been eradicated long ago.

Another global organisation over which the BMGF appears to exert strong influence is the **Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research**

(CGIAR), a consortium of 15 research centres which is the world's most influential network for agricultural research in developing countries. The CGIAR Fund describes itself as "the largest public vehicle for financing the agricultural research needed to meet the food security challenges of the 21st century".⁴⁸ The BMGF has given CGIAR \$720 million since 2003⁴⁹ and in 2014, the BMGF was the world's third largest donor to the CGIAR Fund (after the US and UK) contributing 13 per cent of its entire budget.⁵⁰

With funding comes influence, again. The CGIAR's resources are managed by the CGIAR's Fund Council, on whose board the Gates Foundation sits, the only private organisation to do so. The Council sets the priorities for the use of the Fund and appoints the scientific experts that advise all the Fund's donors.⁵¹ In March 2012, the Fund Council meeting was held at the Gates Foundation in Seattle. Bill Gates told the Fund Council of the need to "triple and double" food productivity in Africa and Asia and said this is "very achievable if the system takes advantage of the latest science, including agricultural biotechnology".⁵² Many of the research centres in the CGIAR consortium, some of which are being directly supported by the BMGF, already have active GM research programmes.⁵³

The foundation is skewing global health policies to its own interests

Legitimising the role of corporations

Multinational pharmaceutical companies play a role in the public-private partnerships heavily promoted by the BMGF, along with some of its own other projects and investments (for the latter see section 2). This has the effect of reinforcing their role in global health policy and decision-making. Both the BMGF-funded Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and the GAVI Alliance, which are public-private partnerships, have close associations with the pharmaceutical industry.

Merck currently sits on the board of the Global Fund⁵⁴ while members of the GAVI board always include companies in the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers, which involves **GlaxoSmithKline, Merck, Novartis, and Pfizer**, among others⁵⁵. Global Health Watch notes that private sector influence on the Global Fund's Board is disproportionately large.⁵⁶

The issue of vaccine pricing has long illustrated the too-dominant role of corporations in the GAVI Alliance. GAVI's association with the pharmaceutical industry has long been criticised. Its Advance Market Commitment – whereby donors commit funds to guarantee the price of vaccines once they have been developed, giving vaccine manufacturers the incentive to invest in vaccine research and development – has long been seen as subsidising big drug companies with aid money.⁵⁷ GAVI is especially criticised for overpaying for vaccines and NGOs have long pressed donors and GAVI to drive down these prices. Oxfam has called for all pharmaceutical companies to step down from the GAVI Board because of their clear conflict of interest.⁵⁸

Beyond GAVI, the NGO, Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) finds that intellectual property rights over vaccines held by a small group of pharmaceutical companies has caused many prices to soar. It states that the cost of fully vaccinating a child is 68 times more than it was a decade ago, "mainly because a handful of big pharmaceutical companies are overcharging donors and developing countries for vaccines that already earn them billions of dollars in wealthy countries".⁵⁹ Of particular note is the pneumococcal vaccine, which protects children from pneumonia – the biggest killer of children under five in developing countries.⁶⁰ **GlaxoSmithKline** and **Pfizer** – which are the only producers of the pneumococcal vaccine – have made over \$19 billion in revenues since its arrival on the market in 2009.⁶¹ MSF is calling on these companies to slash the price of this vaccine to \$5 per child from the current price of around \$60. But Bill Gates has personally dismissed these calls by MSF saying that cutting prices would only serve to deter pharmaceutical companies from working on life-saving products for poor countries.⁶²

Setting the (wrong) agenda

The BMGF's lack of accountability and personalised decision-making (see further below) makes it favour particular private organisations in its grants and promote its own agenda. The foundation's considerable support to the WHO, for example, is 'tied' to projects that it wants to fund, rather than set by the decisions of the World Health Assembly.⁶³ The influence of the BMGF in setting the health policy agenda is critical since NGOs and universities that are not recipients of its money or not aligned to its vision can become marginalised and health issues the foundation deems unimportant can be sidelined. As health expert David McCoy, of University College London, has argued, "this is relevant, because the way the health problems of the poor are defined and prioritised is crucial in framing an effective response".⁶⁴

Gates' dominance of research agendas has also long been a focus of concern. As long ago as 2008, the WHO's head of malaria research, Aarata Kochi, accused the BMGF in a letter to his manager of suppressing diversity of scientific opinion, claiming its decision-making process was "a closed internal process, and as far as can be seen, accountable to none other than itself". He said that the growing dominance of malaria research by the BMGF risked stifling a diversity of views among scientists and wiping out the world health agency's policy-making function. Many of the world's leading malaria scientists were now "locked up in a 'cartel' with their own research funding being linked to those of others within the group"; since "each has a vested interest to safeguard the work of the others", Kochi wrote, getting independent reviews of research proposals "is becoming increasingly difficult".⁶⁵

There have been further criticisms of the BMGF agenda skewing health priorities. In 2009, editors and other health experts writing in the *Lancet* medical journal outlined a number of serious criticisms of the foundation. The foundation was found to direct most of its grants towards organisations in high-income countries, thus exacerbating unequal research and development infrastructures between poor and rich regions. It prioritised funding for malaria and HIV/AIDS, while almost entirely neglecting funds for chronic non-communicable diseases. The *Lancet* articles noted that while the BMGF had given a big boost

to global health funding, "grants made by the foundation do not reflect the burden of disease endured by those in deepest poverty". Funding for research on pneumonia, diarrhea and maternal and child undernutrition – which account for 75 per cent of child deaths – were relatively underfunded by the BMGF. For these diseases, the key is not the new vaccines heavily promoted by the foundation but effective preventive measures which are already well-known, such as breastfeeding and treatments, including antibiotics for pneumonia and oral rehydration therapy and zinc for diarrhoea.⁶⁶

The *Lancet* editors concluded by noting the concern of "many scientists who have long worked in low-income settings...that important health programmes are being distorted by large grants from the Gates Foundation". For example, a focus on malaria in areas where other diseases cause more human harm creates damaging perverse incentives for politicians, policy makers, and health workers. "In some countries, the valuable resources of the foundation are being wasted and diverted from more urgent needs".⁶⁷

Since 2009, the BMGF has appeared to put more emphasis on funding programmes relating to pneumonia and child nutrition, for example. However, it still has an overwhelming focus on vaccines. One problem with the BMGF's heavy focus on developing new vaccines is that it detracts from other, more vital health priorities such as building resilient public health systems. Yet in May 2011, Bill Gates told the World Health Assembly:

"As we think about how to deploy our resources most effectively, one intervention stands out: vaccines. Today, I would like to talk about how you can provide the leadership to make this the Decade of Vaccines".⁶⁸

Yet why should vaccines 'stand out' as the critical need above all others? According to Gates, "Vaccines are an extremely elegant technology. They are inexpensive, they are easy to deliver, and they are proven to protect children from disease. At Microsoft, we dreamed about technologies that were so powerful and yet so simple". It seems as if the BMGF is applying the same logic to global health policy as it did to building a computer empire. Gates ended his speech by calling on all countries to follow his fixation on vaccines:

“Donor countries, you must increase your investment in vaccines and immunization, even though you are coping with budget crises... All 193 member states, you must make vaccines a central focus of your health systems”.⁶⁹

The BMGF has been widely criticised for its prioritisation of technology, particularly vaccines and drugs, as development solutions. Research on new drugs and vaccines has been the single largest destination for BMGF funds, amounting to over a third of all grants given between 1998 and 2007, for example.⁷⁰ Much of this focus is positive – through GAVI, for example, vaccines for Hepatitis B and the Hib (influenza) bacteria have been brought into widespread use.⁷¹ But as Steven Buchsbaum, deputy director of Discovery and Translational Sciences at the BMGF, was quoted as saying in 2015, the transition from looking more at technology to looking more at delivery “has not occurred more broadly within the foundation”.⁷²

The heavy focus on vaccines risks distracting global health policy away from other priorities. University of Toronto public health professor Anne-Emanuelle Birn wrote in 2005 that the BMGF had a “narrowly conceived understanding of health as the product of technical interventions divorced from economic, social, and political contexts”.⁷³ According to health expert David McCoy, “rather than viewing the hundreds of thousands of child deaths from rotavirus infection as a clinical problem that needs a vaccine solution, a better approach might be to view it as a public health problem that needs a social, economic, or political intervention to ensure universal access to clean water and sanitation”.⁷⁴

Within the areas targeted by the BMGF, such as malaria research, some specialists are also criticising the foundation for failing to base programmes on local requirements and needs. For example, Global Health Watch notes that the BMGF-funded Grand Challenges schemes treat vector-borne diseases such as malaria as overly static, privileging vaccine and genetic-modification schemes, which neglect the fact that malaria eradication in Europe was the result of environmental measures, such as the drainage of swamps and improved levels of sanitation, together with large-scale economic development.⁷⁵

Bypassing public health systems

The focus of much BMGF projects is having the effect of bypassing public health systems. Devi Sridhar, a health specialist at Oxford University, has warned that philanthropic interventions are “radically skewing public health programmes towards issues of the greatest concern to wealthy donors – Issues which are not necessarily top priority for people in the recipient country”.⁷⁶ BMGF projects are often ‘vertically’ funded interventions targeted at specific diseases or health problems, largely bypassing existing health systems. The Global Fund, which is supported by the BMGF, says that the bulk of its funding focuses on specific diseases and that only about 10 per cent of the \$25 billion it has disbursed since 2002 has gone toward strengthening health systems.⁷⁷

The failure to invest adequately to build health systems, and the donor push for other priorities, can have tragic consequences. In September 2014, Margaret Chan, the Director General of the WHO, told the *New York Times* in an interview about the ebola outbreak in West Africa that “my budget (is) highly earmarked, so it is driven by what I call donor interests”. Chan added:

“When there’s an event, we have money. Then after that, the money stops coming in, then all the staff you recruited to do the response, you have to terminate their contracts. So I don’t like these kind of ups and downs and ups and downs... When there is no war to fight, these staff would help countries to build preparedness, to build response systems. Just like a fire department. When there is no fire, you help countries to build capacity.”⁷⁸

The inference in Chan’s remarks is that the WHO, whose largest donor is the BMGF, is unable to respond adequately to ebola and other disease outbreaks because donor interests prevent it being able to build public health systems in developing countries.

More resources need to go to general health infrastructure such as training for health workers, ensuring adequate supplies of medicines, or developing systems to detect disease outbreaks. Thus the disease-specific approach has been criticised by several public health experts. Writing in the *British Medical Journal*, public health consultant Stephen Gillam notes that “global initiatives tackling priority diseases like AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria

may undermine broader health services through duplication of effort, distortion of national health plans and budgets, and particularly through diversion of scarce trained staff”.⁷⁹ David Evans, director of the WHO’s health systems department, has also warned that foreign money is going mainly to laboratories and clinics that treat a single disease, rather than providing basic health services, and that the distorting effect of this foreign aid on health systems is worsening as donors become more focused on outcomes.⁸⁰

The *Lancet’s* 2009 study showed that only 1.4 per cent of the foundation’s grants during 1998-2007 went to public sector organisations. Since then, BMGF grants have continued to focus on favoured private organisations, notably NGOs which, although often doing good work, can contribute to exacerbating a fragmented healthcare provision which governments can find difficult to co-ordinate and align to national priorities. A further consequence of this approach is a brain-drain, whereby the public health sector can lose workers to better funded NGOs.⁸¹

Media and NGO influence: is the foundation stifling criticism?

“Even if we were to satisfy ourselves that the Gates Foundation were utterly benign, it would still be worrisome that they wield such enormous propaganda power”.

Mark Crispin Miller, professor of media, culture and communications at New York University⁸²

Over the past decade, the Gates Foundation has devoted over \$1 billion to ‘policy and advocacy’, spending more on these programmes than most other big foundations – such as Rockefeller and MacArthur – spend together. BMGF funds go to several prominent media organisations, such as the Guardian, ABC and AllAfrica. Beyond that, the BMGF has invested millions in training programmes for journalists and funds research on the most effective ways to craft media messages. BMGF-backed organisations turn out media fact sheets and newspaper opinion pieces, while scientific journals get Gates money to publish research and articles. “Everyone follows the Gates foundation’s lead”, a representative of a long-established charity told the Guardian. “It feels like they’re everywhere. Every conference I go to, they’re there. Every study that comes out, they’re part of”.⁸³ As two US analysts note:

“It is not inconceivable that you might find yourself some day reading a story about a Gates-funded health project, written up in a newspaper that gets its health coverage underwritten by Gates, reported by a journalist who attended a Gates-funded journalism training program, citing data collected and analysed by scientists with grants from Gates”.⁸⁴

Is this support to the media constraining its objectivity and reducing critical coverage of the Gates Foundation? The answer appears to be yes. The *Seattle Times*, based in the BMGF’s home city, notes that few of the news organisations that get BMGF money have produced any critical coverage of its projects.⁸⁵ Sophie Harman, an academic at Queen Mary University in London, has said that there are very few actors prepared to say anything negative about the BMGF’s work. One explanation for the silence is that “everyone is scared of challenging Gates and the foundation’s role because they don’t want to lose their funding”.⁸⁶

This is also affecting NGOs, whose lack of criticism of the foundation is palpable. Certainly, some NGOs have criticised aspects of the BMGF’s work, notably Médecins sans Frontières, Global Health Watch, GRAIN, Friends of the Earth and the African Centre for Biodiversity. Yet these are exceptions and consist of NGOs not receiving BMGF funding. The BMGF is supporting numerous larger international NGOs working on health and agriculture, for example, which might otherwise be expected to criticise aspects of the foundation’s agenda, yet which have chosen to remain largely or completely silent.

The foundation reinforces the myth that charity and not justice is the key to development

A rich Bill Gates spending money on the poor in a high-profile, technology-fixated way reinforces the notion that development is about charity and ‘delivering solutions’ to the poor. Charity can certainly help promote development, but when this approach becomes the development model, as it will tend to when ‘donors’ have so much influence over policies, the ‘poor’ become dependent on the ‘rich’, and the latter are seen as saviours while the poor are simply recipients of favours. In this sense, philanthropy is the enemy of justice.⁸⁷ The point is that poor people do not tend to ask for charity,

they demand justice, which requires not so much money from the rich world as fundamental changes in the way the rich world operates: including ending tax havens, limiting the power of corporations, and changing neo-liberal economics. All these are decidedly off the BMGF's agenda, indeed are being exacerbated by it.

A major problem with the focus on technology is that the BMGF, along with other philanthropic foundations, is reshaping aid policy further away from prioritising rights and justice towards a technocratic 'authoritarian development'.⁸⁸ In his 2015 annual letter, for example, Bill Gates wrote that the next 15 years will see major breakthroughs in poor countries which:

“will be driven by innovation in technology – ranging from new vaccines and hardier crops to much cheaper smartphones and tablets – and by innovations that help deliver those things to more people”.

Gates' letter then suggested that climate change might hold back this progress but that the answer is to “develop energy sources that are cheaper, can deliver on demand, and emit zero carbon dioxide”.⁸⁹ In this view, technology is king, and it is largely a question of getting that technology to poor people. Yet addressing climate change is not simply – or even mainly – a matter of inventing new technologies, but of major changes in lifestyle, public policies and corporate behaviour. Other major issues ignored in Gates' analysis are fairer taxation – which could be much more important than aid in providing resources for development – and global inequality – which increases poverty and social instabilities.⁹⁰ These trickier, more 'political' issues should be the real focus of policy-making in international development.

As Oxfam's Duncan Green has argued, Bill Gates' 2015 annual letter offers “a technocrats' charter – a parallel universe in which new tech will solve ill health, climate change, illiteracy and just about everything else – this is a thinking and working politically – free zone”.⁹¹ The prominent development analyst, William Easterly, Professor of Economics at New York University, has articulated similar concerns:

“Gates believes poverty will end by identifying technical solutions. My research shows that the first step is not identifying technical solutions, but ensuring poor people's rights. Gates concentrates his foundation's efforts on finding the right fixes to the problems of the world's poor, such as bed nets to prevent malarial mosquito bites or drought-tolerant varieties of corn to prevent famine. Along with official aid donors, such as USAID and the World Bank, the foundation works together with local, generally autocratic, governments on these technical solutions”.

Easterly cites the example of Gates' praise for Ethiopia's rulers, a country described as setting clear goals and measuring results, but which ignores the repression of Ethiopia's former autocrat Meles Zenawi, who ruled from 1991-2012. Gates said that Meles' death in August 2012 was “a great loss for Ethiopia”.⁹²

The preference for technological solutions over those that address systemic social, economic or political issues favours corporations (since they tend to deliver the technology) and can let governments and donors off the hook, by allowing them to downplay corruption, human rights abuses and social inequality as causes of human suffering.⁹³ A technological approach tends to regard development as a depoliticised process, as though there are few choices over which policies to implement – there are simply technological solutions. Yet there is a big debate between neo-liberal and alternative paradigms, and development policy needs to move away from corporate-led globalisation towards development policies that strengthen social and economic justice.

The foundation remains largely unaccountable

The BMGF is only really accountable to itself, which mainly means Bill and Melinda Gates personally. There is no board of trustees as such; the three trustees are Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffet.¹⁰¹ As a private foundation, the BMGF is obliged only to report its high-level financial figures to the US government to retain its tax-exempt status. The BMGF has influence without accountability.



Powerful and profitable monopolies

Bill Gates' personal wealth results largely from Microsoft achieving **monopolies** in computer operating systems and business software. In seeking patents for their products, pharmaceutical and agribusiness companies depend upon the same basic intellectual property and trade law and this is having an adverse affect on developing countries.

A particularly insidious way in which global patenting adversely affects developing countries is 'biopiracy'. This is the appropriation, usually through patents, of rights over biological materials (such as plants or seeds) by international companies to develop food or medicines, without compensating the countries from which they are taken. The true costs of this are unknown but in 2005 the African Union estimated that Africa loses \$5.6-8 billion a year from biodiversity theft.⁹⁴ A more recent estimate is that losses could be \$15 billion a year for Africa.⁹⁵ What is clear is that the costs are likely to be far greater than Gates Foundation spending in the same countries.

Patenting was given a huge boost in 1994 when, after intense lobbying by multinational corporations, the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) was adopted by the World Trade Organisation. This entrenched the ability of corporations to patent their 'inventions' and protect them with monopoly rights for 20 years or more; in the case of medical drugs, it made it harder for developing countries to access cheap generic drugs and instead forced them to rely mainly on purchasing costly brand-names.⁹⁶ Microsoft is reported to have lobbied vociferously for the TRIPS agreement and has also lobbied the G8 to tighten global intellectual property protection; the latter was a move that would "worsen the health crisis in developing countries", Oxfam said.⁹⁷

Strong intellectual property protection has merits when it genuinely stimulates inventions that work in the public interest but not when it gives transnational corporations enormous power, sometimes amounting to a monopoly, over markets or resources. Generic competition is the most effective way to lower medicine prices in a sustainable way, but patents and other forms of intellectual property protection impede this, and keep prices high. The patent system under the TRIPS agreement is the dominant incentive framework for the development of new medicines. Its incentive structure is driven by profits and favours commercial interests over public health concerns, and does not focus on producing medicines that meet public health needs at a price that societies can afford in the long term. This partly explains the lack of available vaccines for tropical diseases that affect people in the developing world. Low income countries lacking profitable pharmaceutical markets suffer the most from this system.⁹⁸

Microsoft's monopoly position in its core technology business was eventually shown to be illegal in the US. As argued by Barry Ritholtz in the Washington Post:

"Microsoft's greatest strength has always been its monopoly position in the PC chain. Its exclusionary licensing agreement with PC manufacturers mandated a payment for an MS-DOS license whether or not a Microsoft operating system was used. Because it made no sense to pay for two operating systems, it created a huge barrier to entry for any other software firm. No other operating-system maker could get a toehold in the PC market. By the time the company settled with the Justice Department in 1994 over this illegal arrangement, Microsoft had garnered a dominant market share of all operating systems sold.... Its three main product lines – Office, Server Tools and (now slipping into third place) Windows – account for three-quarters of its revenue and nearly all of its profit. It is not a coincidence that these business lines were the direct beneficiaries of the Microsoft monopoly. Indeed, none of Microsoft's other businesses has achieved the success of its monopoly properties."⁹⁹

Microsoft was also found to have acted illegally in Europe. In 2004, the European Commission concluded, after a five-year investigation, that the company had broken EU competition law by leveraging its near-monopoly in the market for PC operating systems onto the markets for work group server operating systems and for media players, in practises that were still ongoing. Microsoft was fined €497 million. The European Commission gave a clear exposition of the way in which Microsoft attempted to achieve its monopoly position:

“Microsoft abused its market power by deliberately restricting interoperability between Windows PCs and non-Microsoft work group servers, and by tying its Windows Media Player, a product where it faced competition, with its ubiquitous Windows operating system. This illegal conduct has enabled Microsoft to acquire a dominant position in the market for work group server operating systems, which are at the heart of corporate IT networks, and risks eliminating competition altogether in that market. In addition, Microsoft’s conduct has significantly weakened competition on the media player market. The ongoing abuses act as a brake on innovation and harm the competitive process and consumers, who ultimately end up with less choice and facing higher prices.”¹⁰⁰

The foundation is decidedly not accountable or answerable in any formal way to any governments in the global south or international institutions. Rather, as Global Health Watch has pointed out,

“The fact that the Gates Foundation is a funder and board member of the various new Global Health Initiatives (e.g. the Global Fund; GAVI, Stop TB Partnership; and Roll Back Malaria) means that other global health actors are accountable to the Gates Foundation, but not the other way round.”¹⁰²

Despite its global influence, there is little independent or formal scrutiny over the Gates Foundation’s projects and strategy, and no apparent critical analysis at all from within the official aid system. This is a long unaddressed issue: in 2009, the *Lancet* noted that BMGF funding could boast a number of achievements in global health but that it had received “little external scrutiny”. Furthermore:

“Grant-making by the Gates Foundation seems to be largely managed through an informal system of personal networks and relationships rather than by a more transparent process based on independent and technical peer review”¹⁰³

As the Peoples Health Movement has noted, despite the strong influence the BMGF exerts on global health policies, the effects of the policies it promotes have never been evaluated.¹⁰⁴ In 2011, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD – the body that monitors aid spending by donors – included the BMGF in its statistical reporting for the first time. Yet the DAC has not subjected the BMGF to a ‘peer review’ of its aid strategy, in the same way that bilateral aid donors are.¹⁰⁵

The BMGF is not required to be subjected to independent evaluations of its work, although individual projects funded by the BMGF may require evaluations as a condition of grants. The foundation does have an evaluation policy¹⁰⁶ but it does not appear to publish the evaluations it requires and it is not clear if these are genuinely independent. The BMGF has a website with annual reports, an annual letter from Bill Gates and some other material, but this information is for advocacy and public relations rather than enabling scrutiny of the activities funded by the foundation.¹⁰⁷ The website includes a searchable database of the BMGF’s grants, but information is usually one or two sentences only, meaning that it is difficult to even find out precisely what the foundation is funding.

2. Promoting corporate interests

The Gates Foundation works closely with many corporations whose role and policies contribute to ongoing poverty. The BMGF does not see these corporations as a problem, but as partners in development. The foundation's strategy is a major challenge to progressive development actors and activists around the world, who want to see the influence of multinational corporations in global markets reduced or eliminated.

The foundation not only funds projects in which agricultural and pharmaceutical corporations are among the leading beneficiaries, the BMGF Trust also invests in many to provide the funds for its ongoing 'charitable' activities. Moreover, it often invests in the same companies as it is funding, meaning the foundation has an interest in the ongoing profitability of these corporations. This is a corporate merry-go-round where the BMGF consistently acts in the interests of corporations. This state of affairs is perhaps not surprising since senior foundation staff are overwhelmingly drawn from corporate America.

The foundation prioritises support for corporations

The foundation's close relationship with seed and chemical giant **Monsanto** is best-known. The BMGF, which previously owned shares in the company, promotes several projects in which Monsanto is a beneficiary, notably support for GM research (see section 3). But the BMGF partners with many other multinational corporations, notably in the areas of agriculture – where the BMGF is a heavy pusher of chemicals and patented seeds – and in health – where foundation funds go to projects in which Big Pharma are among the beneficiaries.

For example, the foundation is working with giant US trader **Cargill** in an \$8 million project to "develop the soya value chain" in southern Africa. The project is meant to run for four years, beginning in Mozambique and Zambia where it is aimed at 37,000 small-scale

farmers, but will be later replicated in other regions. Cargill is the biggest global player in the production and trade in soya with heavy investments in Latin America where GM soya mono-crops have displaced rural populations and caused environmental damage. The BMGF-funded project will likely enable Cargill to capture a hitherto untapped African soya market and eventually introduce GM soya onto the continent.¹⁰⁸ The end markets for this soya are companies with relationships with the fast food outlet, KFC, whose expansion in Africa is being aided by the project. Small farmers may benefit from the project, but only by participating in value chains dominated by large buyers.¹⁰⁹

The BMGF is also supporting Cargill and other multinationals by providing \$34 million to the **World Cocoa Foundation** in a project aimed at "improving marketing efficiency, production efficiency and income security" for cocoa farmers in West Africa. The project provides "matching grants to industry players who will focus on improving the productivity of cocoa".¹¹⁰ The World Cocoa Foundation is a corporate body representing the world's major food and cocoa companies, such as **Nestle**, **Mondelez** and **Mars**.

The BMGF is also supporting projects involving other chemicals and seed corporations:

- **DuPont Pioneer** is the lead scientific partner in the BMGF-funded African Biofortified Sorghum project. This aims "to develop a transgenic (ie, genetically-modified) sorghum that contains increased levels of essential nutrients, especially lysine, Vitamin A, iron and zinc".¹¹¹
- **Syngenta** is being supported by foundation funding of the Innovative Vector Control Consortium (IVCC), which seeks to develop anti-malaria technologies. As part of this programme, Syngenta led a team to develop the Actellic spray, which fights insecticide resistant mosquitoes.¹¹²
- **Bayer** is being supported through the Better Access to Safe and Effective Contraception project, which aims to increase access to

contraception for women in low-income countries.¹¹³ The BMGF is also reported to be collaborating in Bayer's promotion of "new chemical approaches" and "biological crop protection" (i.e. encouraging agro-chemical sales and GM crops) in the global south.¹¹⁴

Some of the above-mentioned projects are concerning in themselves. Some, considered in total isolation, might be positive. But the context is critical – the projects raise the question as to why the BMGF is funding companies with massive resources already at their disposal and whose very power is often part of the problem in addressing serious global issues.

Similarly, the BMGF is supporting an array of pharmaceutical companies, some of which involve global public-private partnerships, noted in section 1. The BMGF has, for example, given **GlaxoSmithKline** two grants for an ebola vaccine and for anti-TB and anti-malaria work.¹¹⁵ In June 2013, the BMGF also funded **Merck** to support the development and registration of new methods to treat schistosomiasis (a disease caused by parasitic worms, also known as bilharzia.).¹¹⁶ The BMGF also partners with Merck in jointly funding Botswana's African Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Partnerships project.¹¹⁷

The NGO that has received most funding in health from the foundation is the **Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH)**, which has been given a staggering amount, around \$1 billion, mainly for medical research and development. This extent of funding makes PATH virtually an "agent of the foundation", according to health expert David McCoy, writing in the *Lancet*.¹¹⁸ PATH is also firmly entrenched in Big Pharma. It describes itself as "the leading innovator in global health and a pioneer in leveraging the expertise and resources of corporate partners to drive transformative innovation to scale". PATH works with more than 60 corporate partners to create "market-based solutions", including the pharmaceutical companies **Merck** and **Sanofi**, mining company **BHP Billiton** and one other notable firm – **Microsoft**.¹¹⁹

The foundation is profiting from its investments in corporations which contribute to social and economic injustice

The BMGF distributes money to grantees while the BMGF Trust manages the endowment assets and invests in companies. Bill and Melinda Gates are the only trustees of the Trust while they are joined by Warren Buffet as a further trustee of the foundation.ⁱⁱ Much of the BMGF's money for its charitable activities derives from investments by the BMGF Trust in companies which are contributing to the problems of poverty, inequality and injustice in the first place. According to its financial statements, the Trust had \$29 billion worth of investments in corporate stocks and bonds in 2014.¹²⁰ The investees include many of the most criticised companies in the world for involvement in human rights, labour and environmental abuses, and tax avoidance.¹²¹ As of 2014, the BMGF Trust had investments in:

- the mining companies **Barrick Gold, BHP Billiton, Freeport McMoran, Glencore, Rio Tinto, Vale** and **Vedanta**
- agribusiness companies **Archer Daniels Midland, Kraft, Mondelez International, Nestle** and **Unilever**
- chemical and pharmaceutical corporations **BASF, Dow Chemicals, GlaxoSmithKline, Novartis**, and **Pfizer**
- beverage corporations **Coca-Cola, Diageo, Pepsico** and **SABMiller**
- US multinational retail chain **Wal-Mart**

As of end 2014, the BMGF Trust also had investments worth \$852 million in construction company **Caterpillar**, which has long been accused of complicity in human rights abuses in the Palestinian Occupied Territories.¹²² **BAE Systems**, the UK's largest arms exporter, is another investee.¹²³

The BMGF Trust foundation has a history of investing in fast food companies that undermine its claim to be promoting global nutrition – one of its core grant areas. It held shares in **McDonald's** until December

ii. 'Foundation Trust', <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Who-We-Are/General-Information/Financials/Foundation-Trust>



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2014 and still holds shares in **Arcos Dorados** – Latin America’s largest quick service chain and the largest McDonald’s franchisee in the world, which operates the latter’s 2,602 restaurants.¹²⁴

Recent research by the *Guardian* found that the BMGF Trust has a financial stake of \$1.4 billion in fossil fuel companies. The companies included not only **BP** but also **Anadarko Petroleum** – which was recently forced to pay a \$5 billion environmental clean-up charge – and Brazilian mining company **Vale** – voted the corporation with most “contempt for the environment and human rights” in the Public Eye annual awards. The *Guardian* study also found that the BMGF Trust had investments in 35 of the top 200 companies ranked by the carbon

held in their reserves. These included coal giants **Anglo American, BHP Billiton, Glencore Xstrata and Peabody Energy** and the oil majors **Shell, ConocoPhillips, Chevron, Total and Petrobras**.

These investments hardly promote Gates’ major concern – global health. A recent report by the *Lancet* medical journal and University College London concluded that climate change is “the biggest global health threat of the 21st century”.¹²⁵ Bill Gates announced in June 2015 that he would invest \$2 billion in renewable energy projects.¹²⁶ However, Gates said in October 2015 that fossil fuel divestment is “a false solution”, at the same time as accusing environmentalists of making misleading claims about the price of solar power.¹²⁷

The corporate merry-go-round

The BMGF's financial viability is intimately bound up with the ongoing profitability of corporate America. Not only does the BMGF Trust invest in corporations, the foundation also uses its charitable funds to support some of the same corporations. As noted above, the BMGF Trust has shares in various pharmaceutical companies which benefit from the global public-private health partnerships funded by the BMGF. It also has shares in several companies producing agro-chemicals and seeds which benefit from the foundation's big promotion of fertiliser use in Africa (see section 3 below).

The BMGF had \$538 million worth of shares in **Coca-Cola** in 2014.¹²⁸ At the same time, some BMGF grants encourage communities in developing countries to become business affiliates of **Coca-Cola**.¹²⁹ The BMGF is jointly funding a project with Coca-Cola to produce passion fruits in Kenya for export; in this project 50,000 farmers are being trained to produce for Coca-Cola's supply chain.¹³⁰ The holding in Coca-Cola contradicts the foundation's avowed intention to promote global nutrition.

The BMGF Trust has previously held investments in other companies which benefitted from its own funding, notably **Monsanto** and a raft of multinational pharmaceutical companies including **Merck** (which stake was sold mainly in 2009).¹³¹ The BMGF Trust held stock in **Merck** at a time when it supported the African Comprehensive AIDS and Malaria Partnership, noted above.¹³²

Furthermore, the BMGF Trust's biggest investment, worth \$11.8 billion in 2014, is in the US conglomerate **Berkshire Hathaway**, whose Chief Executive is Warren Buffett – a trustee of the BMGF – who has donated billions to the foundation.¹³³ Berkshire Hathaway has 60 mainly US-based subsidiaries in sectors including agriculture, energy, retail, media, transportation, electronics, chemicals, jewellery, furniture and insurance.¹³⁴ Bill Gates also serves as a board member of Berkshire Hathaway¹³⁵ which has shares in several corporations which are also beneficiaries of BMGF-funded projects such as **GlaxoSmithKline** and **Mondelez International**.¹³⁶

Many of the NGO and academic recipients of BMGF grants also work in partnership with corporations in which the BMGF Trust is investing and/or which it is otherwise supporting. For example, as noted above, the US NGO, PATH – the largest NGO recipient of BMGF health funding – works in corporate partnership with **Merck**.¹³⁷ In agriculture, the NGO that has received most BMGF funding (\$85 million) is Technoserve¹³⁸, whose strapline is "Business solutions to poverty" and which works as a "catalyst and partner to strengthen market systems", believing in the "power of private enterprise to transform lives".¹³⁹ Technoserve is one of several pro-business US-based NGOs supported by the BMGF with close links to USAID.

The BMGF is part of corporate America

Most senior staff in the Gates Foundation previously worked in US-based multinational corporations, including those its trust has invested in and otherwise promotes. This is particularly the case with the BMGF's health programmes; thus the foundation's work in this area is led not by public health professionals so much as by former executives in the drug industry. To give some examples:

- Sue Desmond-Hellmann, the BMGF's CEO, spent 14 years at Genentech, a leading health biotechnology company, and was subsequently Chancellor of the University of California at San Francisco, where she "supported the creation of research partnerships with industry leaders such as Pfizer and Bayer".¹⁴⁰
- Leigh Morgan, Chief Operating Officer, previously worked at GlaxoSmithKline and Genentech.¹⁴¹
- Emilio Emini joined the BMGF in 2015 as Director of HIV from a position as Chief Scientific Officer and Senior Vice President of Vaccine Research at Pfizer. While at Pfizer, he was already "a senior advisor to the Gates Foundation's HIV team". Previously, Emini was the founding Executive Director of Merck's Department of Antiviral Research and the Vice President of Merck's Vaccine and Biologics Research.¹⁴²
- Keith Chirgwin, Deputy Director of Regulatory Affairs at the BMGF, was previously vice president at **Merck** Research Labs.¹⁴³
- Penny Heato, who leads Vaccine Development at the BMGF, was previously Global Head of Clinical Research and Development Clusters for Novartis Vaccines and Diagnostics and Senior Director of Vaccines Clinical Research at Merck Research Laboratories.¹⁴⁴
- Trevor Mundel, President of Global Health at the BMGF, who leads the foundation's research and development health, vaccines and drugs, was previously involved in clinical research at Pfizer.¹⁴⁵

Similarly, the foundation's agriculture and communications work is largely led by former corporate executives from agribusiness:

- Rob Horsch, who leads the Agricultural Research and Development team, worked at Monsanto for 25 years prior to joining the BMGF.¹⁴⁶
- Sam Dryden, the head of Agricultural Development at the BMGF, previously worked for Monsanto, giant chemical company Union Carbide (where he helped establish Dow AgroSciences, one of the world's largest GM crop companies) and headed two of the world's largest GM seed companies. He was also CEO of Emergent Genetics, the US's third largest cotton seed company, which was sold to Monsanto in 2005.¹⁴⁷
- Miguel Veiga-Pestana, Chief Communications Officer at the BMGF, previously served as Vice-President, Global Sustainability Strategy and External Advocacy at Unilever.¹⁴⁸

The foundation and Microsoft's expansion in Africa – a case study

It may be little known that Microsoft – the source of Bill Gates' money – has major business interests in Africa. Microsoft has 22 offices in 19 cities across 14 countries, and has a network of more than 10,000 partners in Africa.¹⁴⁹ The company has been doing business in Africa for 20 years, which dates its activities back to around 1995, shortly before Bill and Melinda Gates started their aid activities in 1997.¹⁵⁰ Reports suggest that Microsoft's investment in Africa has grown steadily, with a particular focus in the education sector, as well as financial services and oil and gas businesses.¹⁵¹ Microsoft's expansion has coincided with increasing BMGF activities across the continent.

The BMGF and Microsoft have always been closely intertwined given the personal role of Bill Gates in both. Similarly, two other former Chief Executives of the BMGF were at Microsoft – Jeff Raikes, who was Microsoft's key figure after Gates, and Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, who was Chief Executive of the BMGF until 2013.¹⁵² Writing in the *Guardian*, Andy Beckett has speculated that "a suspicion lingers, slowly fading but still there, that the foundation's activities are some sort of penance for Gates' world-dominating behaviour at Microsoft – or a continuation of that world domination by other means".¹⁵³

Beckett's latter point does not infer a conspiracy theory but rather points to a confluence of interests between Bill Gates' two organisations. Gates himself sees little conflict between making money and doing good. It simply seems rational to posit that the BMGF is helping Microsoft – by promoting corporate-led development in Africa, by helping to bring about government policies that are pro-business, and by undertaking activities that give Bill Gates a good name. Microsoft clearly sees Africa as an exciting new business opportunity.

The Microsoft 4Afrika Initiative, launched in February 2013, is "a new effort through which the company will actively engage in Africa's economic development to improve its global competitiveness", the company states. The initiative promotes the development of Windows 8 and Windows Phone apps and:

"represents our increased commitment to Africa as we celebrate 20 years of doing business on the continent... As we look forward to our next 20 years, we wanted to explore new ways to link the growth of our business with initiatives that accelerate growth for the continent...The Microsoft 4Afrika Initiative is built on the dual beliefs that technology can accelerate growth for Africa, and Africa can also accelerate technology for the world".¹⁵⁴

Ali Faramawy, Microsoft's Corporate Vice President for the Middle East and Africa, has written that:

"The world has recognized the promise of Africa, and Microsoft wants to invest in that promise... At Microsoft, we view the African continent as a game-changer in the global economy."¹⁵⁵

Faramawy notes that the Microsoft 4Afrika Initiative aims to "place tens of millions of smart devices in the hands of African youth" by 2016, notably the Windows Phone 8, a joint project with Chinese firm, Huawei. The market is large since "in Africa today, smartphones account for only about 10 per cent of total phones in the market".¹⁵⁶ Fernando de Sousa, Microsoft's general manager for Africa Initiatives, has said that "Africa is growing smartphone use faster than anywhere in the world".¹⁵⁷ Microsoft states:

"The launches of Windows 8 and many other new products in the coming months represent a new era for Microsoft, which we believe will redefine the technology industry globally. These additional investments under the 4Afrika banner will help define our company's new era in Africa".¹⁵⁸

3. Supporting industrial agriculture

The BMGF is promoting a number of specific priorities through its agriculture grants, several of which are undermining the interests of small farmers while claiming to support them. These include promoting a model of industrial agriculture, the increasing use of chemical fertilisers and expensive, patented seeds, the privatisation of extension services and a very large focus on genetically modified seeds. Indian scientist Vandana Shiva has called the Gates Foundation the “greatest threat to farmers in the developing world”.¹⁵⁹

The foundation bankrolls the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa in pushing industrial agriculture

The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) has become Africa’s most prominent organisation ostensibly aiming to eradicate hunger across the continent. It was established by the Gates and Rockefeller Foundations in 2006 to “improve African agriculture, and to do so as rapidly as possible”.¹⁶⁰ Since then, the BMGF has given grants of around \$420 million to AGRA¹⁶¹, which is in practice a BMGF subsidiary. Former Gates Foundation CEO Jeff Raikes and its director of agriculture, Pamela Anderson, both sit on the board of AGRA¹⁶², which has been described by the BMGF as the “African face and voice for our work”.¹⁶³

By no means all of AGRA’s work is negative. Some of its projects support soil health and women farmers, for example, and are likely to be beneficial, although there are few if any independent evaluations of these programmes. However, the thrust of AGRA’s work, as its name suggests, is to support industrial agriculture – with a main focus on promoting technology such as hybrid seeds and chemical fertiliser. The main problem with AGRA is that it is laying the groundwork for the deeper penetration of African agriculture by agribusiness corporations.

Pushing chemical fertiliser

The BMGF website is disingenuous on its support for industrial agriculture. It says that “we encourage farmers to embrace and adopt sustainable practices that help them grow more with less land, water, fertiliser, and other costly inputs while preserving natural resources for future generations”.¹⁶⁴ Yet the precise thrust of AGRA’s work is to promote such “costly inputs”, notably fertiliser, despite evidence to suggest chemical fertilisers have significant health risks for farm workers, increase soil erosion and can trap small-scale farmers in unsustainable debt.¹⁶⁵ The BMGF, through AGRA, is one of the world’s largest promoters of chemical fertiliser. Some grants given by the BMGF to AGRA have been specifically intended to “help AGRA build the fertiliser supply chain” in Africa.¹⁶⁶ One of the largest of AGRA’s own grants, worth \$25 million, was to help establish the African Fertiliser Agribusiness Partnership (AFAP) in 2012¹⁶⁷ whose very goal is to “at least double total fertiliser use” in Africa¹⁶⁸. In fact, the then president of AGRA, Namanga Ngongi, a former UN official, left his AGRA position to become the founding (and current) chair of AFAP in 2012.¹⁶⁹

In August 2014, AGRA released a major report, lamenting the “under-use” of chemical fertiliser by African farmers. It noted that AGRA is supporting AFAP “to develop new fertiliser production, storage and retail operations, with an initial focus on providing an additional 225,000 tons of fertiliser to farmers in three countries” (Ghana, Mozambique and Tanzania).¹⁷⁰ The AFAP project is being pursued in partnership with the International Fertiliser Development Centre, a body which represents the fertiliser industry.¹⁷¹

The foundation's priorities are a threat to agroecology

AGRA's agenda is the biggest direct threat to the growing movement in support of food sovereignty and agroecological farming methods in Africa. This movement opposes reliance on chemicals, expensive seeds and GM and instead promotes an approach which allows communities control over the way food is produced, traded and consumed. It is seeking to create a food system that is designed to help people and the environment rather than make profits for multinational corporations.¹⁷² Priority is given to promoting healthy farming and healthy food by protecting soil, water and climate, and promoting biodiversity.

There is substantial evidence that agroecological farming can increase yields significantly, often comparably to or greater than industrial agriculture, and that it is more profitable for small farmers.¹⁷³ In 2011, the then UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter called on countries in his seminal report on agro-ecology to reorient their agriculture policies to promote sustainable systems that realise the right to food. He stated that "agroecology delivers advantages that are complementary to better known conventional approaches such as breeding high-yielding varieties" and stated that "the scaling up of these experiences is the main challenge today".¹⁷⁴ De Schutter has directly challenged the BMGF's push for a Green Revolution, asking:

"The questions of empowerment and participation are key here. It is unrealistic to seek to achieve sustainable progress in combating rural poverty simply through technology: the political economy of the food systems, the question of bargaining power, are in fact key ingredients, as important as seeds... How sustainable is the classic green revolution package, of improved seeds, chemical fertilisers and pesticides, in a world that is running out of fossil energies, and in which control over these inputs is in the hands of a limited number of very large corporations that are accountable only to their shareholders?"¹⁷⁵



Global Justice Now calls on the BMGF to “Free the Seeds”, March 2015

Pushing patented seed

A further key work area for AGRA is seed policy, on which it regularly lobbies African governments.¹⁷⁶ Currently, over 80 per cent of Africa’s seed supply comes from millions of small-scale farmers recycling and exchanging seed from year to year. But as the African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) has noted, “a battle is currently being waged over Africa’s seed systems”.¹⁷⁷

The ACB notes that although AGRA recognises diversity and plurality in seed systems in Africa (where farmers overwhelmingly use their own, or saved, seed), its orientation is towards promoting the commercial production of seed. AGRA therefore supports the introduction of commercial seed systems, which risk enabling a

few large companies to control seed research and development, production and distribution. In order for commercial seed companies to invest in research and development, they first want to protect their ‘intellectual property’. This requires a fundamental restructuring of seed laws to allow for certification systems that not only protect certified varieties and royalties derived from them, but which actually criminalise all non-certified seed. Over the past two decades, a long and slow process of national seed law reviews, sponsored by USAID and the G8, along with the BMGF and others has opened the door to multinational corporations’ involvement in seed production, including the acquisition of every sizeable seed enterprise on the continent. As the ACB notes, this is a serious threat to African seed systems and to biodiversity.¹⁷⁸

Hybrid seed varieties are regularly touted as a solution to Africa's food productivity 'problem', and are being strongly promoted by various organisations supported by the BMGF. Yet hybrid seeds are often expensive for small-scale farmers and can lock them into a requirement to purchase seeds every year.¹⁷⁹ Hybrids may offer yield advantages, but do not always, and only do so in the right conditions, such as when coupled with continuous use of synthetic fertiliser (which also has to be purchased), irrigation, larger areas of land and mono-cropping – the Green Revolution package.¹⁸⁰ A more positive agenda to the BMGF/AGRA approach encouraging patented seed is to promote seed saving and indigenous public seed banks.

The BMGF is playing a major role in helping corporations break into new seed markets, as shown by a secretive conference in London in March 2015 witnessed by Global Justice Now. At the conference, co-organised by the BMGF with USAID, corporations discussed how to increase their control of the global seed sector. AGRA and seed corporation Syngenta were on the list of invitees, among other corporate entities, but no farmer organisations were invited. One aim of the conference appeared to be to share the findings of a report by Monitor Deloitte on developing the commercial seed sector in sub-Saharan Africa. The report recommends that in countries where demand for patented seeds is weaker (i.e. where farmers are using their own seed saving networks), public-private partnerships should be developed so that private companies are protected from 'investment risk'. It also recommends that NGOs and aid donors should encourage governments to introduce intellectual property rights for seed breeders and help to persuade farmers to buy commercial, patented seeds rather than relying on their own traditional varieties.¹⁸¹ The conference is understood to have discussed seed markets for maize, rice, sorghum, cowpea, cassava and sweet potato in Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.¹⁸²

'Creating demand' for inputs and privatising extension services

Alongside pushing fertiliser and patented seeds, another of AGRA's key programmes since its inception has been support to agro-dealer networks – small, private stockists of chemicals and seeds who sell these to farmers in several African countries. Research found that the Malawi agro-dealer network was a vehicle to push the products sold by corporations.¹⁸³ In so doing, it was increasing the reliance of farmers on chemical inputs and marginalising sustainable agriculture alternatives. The main supplier to the agro-dealers in Malawi has been Monsanto, responsible for 67 per cent of all inputs.¹⁸⁴ An evaluation report into the agro-dealer network states that the programme achieved an 85 per cent increase in the sales of the agro-dealers and that they sold 10,908 tonnes of seed and 18,071 tonnes of fertilisers during 2007-10. Around 10 maize hybrids were sold – five from Monsanto, five from another company, SeedCo.¹⁸⁵

That the Malawi agro-dealer network aimed to "create demand" by farmers for the products supplied by transnational agribusiness is explicit in the project literature. "Agro-dealers... act as vessels for promoting input suppliers' products", one project document reads.¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, the training of the agro-dealers on product knowledge has been done by the corporate suppliers of those products themselves. Also critical is that these agro-dealers are increasingly the source of farming advice to small farmers, and an alternative to the government's agricultural extension service. A project evaluation report states that 44 per cent of the agro-dealers in the programme were providing extension services.¹⁸⁷ Indeed, a World Bank report notes that:

"the agro-dealers have...become the most important extension nodes for the rural poor...A new form of private sector driven extension system is emerging in these countries (Kenya and Uganda as well as Malawi) as the major agricultural input supply companies are increasingly conducting commercial demonstrations of new technologies in rural areas with rural stockists"¹⁸⁸

The foundation is the world's biggest funder of GM research

One of the greatest controversies of the BMGF's funding is its support for research into genetic modification (GM). But alongside funding research, the foundation is also funding public relations activities and changes to national regulations to promote the widespread adoption of GM. There are several concerns and dangers related to GM. Evidence from the roll-out of GM crops in countries where this is occurring shows that these crops often push farmers into debt, cause irreversible environmental damage and encourage land concentration, among other problems.¹⁸⁹ Genetic engineering has failed to increase the yield of food crops but has vastly increased the use of chemicals and the growth of "superweeds", according to a recent report by 20 Indian, south-east Asian, African and Latin American food and conservation groups.¹⁹⁰

The BMGF is probably the world's leading funder of GM research in the global south. In an interview with the *Guardian's* John Vidal in 2012, the BMGF's head of agriculture, Sam Dryden, said that "only" 5 per cent of Gates' agricultural money is directed at transgenic research and development. But as Vidal noted, that may be around \$100 million since 2007 – more than any other government or world body is known to have handed out.¹⁹¹ The NGO, GM Freeze, suggests that the figure is even higher, calculating that the BMGF allocated at least \$162 million to projects generating GM seeds between 2005 and 2011.¹⁹² Dryden told the *Guardian*: "The more we can drive the option (of GM) into a national programme, the better... We work usually (via) the national research agencies. It gives them the option".¹⁹³

Misleading on GM

The BMGF does not suggest that it is big on pushing GM. In the introduction to its work on agriculture, GM is not mentioned.¹⁹⁴ Neither is support for GM specifically mentioned in the project information on the BMGF's grants database. This is disingenuous given the scale of the BMGF's GM funding. It is also particularly misleading given that the BMGF's senior officer responsible for "improving crop yields" in Africa – Rob Horsch, who was hired from Monsanto – has said that he was specifically recruited by the foundation to promote "biotechnology". In a 2006 article, Horsch wrote that he was called up by the foundation and informed of his brief: "My mission: improve crop yields via the best and most appropriate science and technology, including biotechnology, for problems in regions including sub-Saharan Africa".¹⁹⁵

Major recipients of the BMGF's GM-linked grants include the African Agricultural Technology Foundation, to which the BMGF has given over \$100 million¹⁹⁶, and the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, based in Trieste, which has received nine grants worth over \$13 million¹⁹⁷. The Queensland University of Technology, which also works on GM, has received six agriculture grants worth \$14 million.¹⁹⁸

The foundation is also pushing GM research in the UK. In 2012, a team of British plant scientists at the John Innes Centre in Norwich won a \$10 million grant to develop GM cereal crops; this was one of the largest single investments in GM in the UK.¹⁹⁹ The Swindon-based Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, which also promotes GM research, received an \$8 million grant in 2010 to "support high quality research on sustainable crop production in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia".²⁰⁰

Targeting new markets in Africa

The major beneficiaries of the BMGF's push for GM are of course the giant seed manufacturers, such as Monsanto, Syngenta, Bayer and Dupont, and the agro-chemical companies producing fertiliser and pesticides, some of which are being supported in other BMGF-funded projects and investments by the BMFG Trust. The Gates Foundation is in effect preparing the ground for them to access new profitable markets in hitherto closed-off developing countries, especially in Africa.

The BMGF is especially pushing for the adoption of GM in Africa, in many cases against public and governmental opposition. The BMGF-funded Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA) project, in which Monsanto is a partner, is developing drought-tolerant maize seed in South Africa, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique. It is ostensibly a conventional research project but is in reality laying the groundwork for the acceptance of GM maize.²⁰¹ Monsanto's has 'donated' to the project one of its most lucrative commercial drought-tolerant genes, but this could be a strategy to run field trials and gain approval rather than going through the usual commercial application route.²⁰² Friends of the Earth notes that the WEMA project provides Monsanto with an opportunity to influence biosafety regulation in participating countries and open new markets for new 'climate ready' crops. Thus WEMA appears to be a Trojan horse to press participating governments to pass weak biosafety and seed regulations and open the door to cultivating GM crops. In mid-2015 the South African authorities gave the go-ahead for Monsanto to commercially sell its GM drought-tolerant maize seed for cultivation in South Africa, a direct outcome of the WEMA project.²⁰³ According to the African Centre for Biodiversity, WEMA ultimately aims to shift the focus and ownership of maize breeding, seed production and marketing almost exclusively into the private sector and thus ensnare small-scale farmers in Africa into adopting hybrid maize varieties and their accompanying synthetic fertilisers and pesticides.²⁰⁴

It is clear that the BMGF wants to see GM introduced throughout Africa. In July 2015, for example, Christopher Elias, the foundation's head of global development, praised the GM maize the foundation is promoting in Kenya through WEMA, and stated that an application to allow cultivation was now with the National Biosafety Authority for consideration. He added:

"Through initiatives like WEMA, Africa can achieve food security by 2030...If Africa is to successfully tackle food insecurity, then African farmers should be able to have access to a full range of options for crop improvement and protection, including GM technology".²⁰⁵

Similarly, in March 2013, Sam Dryden, the BMGF's head of agriculture, said that GM was a question of "choice" for farmers and wrote that he expected 20 million farmers to be planting new seed varieties, including GM, before the end of the decade.²⁰⁶

Until 2008, South Africa had been the only African country using GM technology, but has since been joined by Egypt, Burkina Faso and Sudan. However, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Mali, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Ghana are researching GM seeds and growing trial crops of cotton, maize or sorghum, partly thanks to projects such as WEMA.²⁰⁷ WEMA's African partners have made major strides in promoting GM crops in Kenya, and the country's leading agricultural research institute, KARI, has announced that it will introduce GM maize to farmers' fields by 2017. In Tanzania, researchers backed by the BMGF and the African Agricultural Technology Foundation are working on GM in laboratories pending ongoing talks for possible field trials; some reports suggest that Tanzania could also introduce its first commercial GM maize by 2017.²⁰⁸ It is also reported that the BMGF plans to establish a biotechnology lab in Nigeria to improve biotechnology capacity for "crop improvement".²⁰⁹



Another BMGF-funded project aims to bring GM vitamin A-enriched banana (matooke) to Uganda and other East African countries. Field trials are taking place in Uganda, using varieties developed by scientists at the Queensland University of Technology in Australia, also funded by the BMGF.²¹⁰ This has been described as “a clear case of biopiracy” since the original banana gene being used to develop these ‘super-bananas’ is the Asupina cultivar, collected 25 years earlier from Papua New Guinea and “the rightful property of the nation and the communities that developed it”. Furthermore, ‘red bananas’ rich in pre-Vitamin A are already grown around the world with no need for any genetic modification.²¹¹

US companies, which produce most of the world’s GM crops, are seeking new markets in Africa, and trying to change African biosafety laws to allow

them to do so.²¹² The BMGF plays a major role in this strategy by supporting public relations on GM, evident in several grants awarded to institutions working on GM and biotechnology:

- In March 2012, it gave \$3.99 million to the African Agricultural Technology Foundation “to enhance knowledge-sharing and awareness on agricultural biotechnology for improved understanding and appreciation”.²¹³
- Michigan State University was given \$13 million to help African policy makers “to make informed decisions on how to use biotechnology”.²¹⁴
- In June 2014, the BMGF gave \$5.6 million to another major GM developer and advocate, Cornell University, “to support a global agricultural communications platform that will improve understanding of science-based agricultural technologies”.²¹⁵

The foundation pays insufficient attention to farmers' and local knowledge in the design of programmes

The BMGF says that it listens to farmers and addresses their specific needs; “We talk to farmers about the crops they want to grow and eat, as well as the unique challenges they face”, the BMGF’s website states.²¹⁶ While this may be true in some projects, the act of listening and the act of formulating policy based on those concerns are quite different. Much of the BMGF’s work appears to bypass local knowledge. To an extent, this is a feature of the BMGF’s stress on technological solutions, the organisation’s lack of accountability, and its somewhat personalised decision-making process, all of which have been noted above.

A recent analysis of BMGF grants by the NGO, GRAIN could find no evidence of any support from the foundation for programmes of research or technology development carried out by farmers or based on farmers’ knowledge, despite the multitude of such initiatives that exist in Africa. GRAIN’s conclusion was that “nowhere in the programmes funded by the Gates Foundation is there any indication that it believes that Africa’s small farmers have anything to teach”.²¹⁷ Rather, the foundation is “orientated towards bringing foreign technology into Africa and opening up markets to foreign corporations, rather than building on the possibilities, capacities and knowledge the farmers already have”.²¹⁸

By contrast, the single biggest recipient of agriculture grants from the BMGF is the CGIAR, which, as noted above, has received over \$720 million since 2003. During the same period, another \$678 million went to universities and national research centres across the world – over three-quarters of them in the US and Europe – for research and development of specific technologies, such as crop varieties and breeding techniques. The BMGF subsidiary, AGRA, trains farmers on how to use these technologies, and even organises them into groups to better access the technologies, but it does not appear to support farmers in building up their own seed systems or in doing their own research.²¹⁹

BMGF funding of GM ‘super-bananas’ in Uganda has been noted above. Commenting on this project, world-renowned scientist and activist Vandana Shiva has called this “the latest insanity from genetic engineers”. She notes that 75 per cent of Indian women suffer from iron deficiency. But that “any woman will tell you that the solution to malnutrition lies in growing nutrition, which means growing biodiversity”, which in turn means growing iron-rich plants everywhere. Indian women have a wealth of knowledge about biodiversity and nutrition; they received it over generations from their mothers and grandmothers:

“But there is a ‘creation myth’ that is blind to both, nature’s creativity and biodiversity as well as to women’s creativity, intelligence and knowledge. According to this “creation myth” of capitalist patriarchy, rich and powerful men are the “creators”. They can own life through patents and intellectual property”.

Shiva dismisses the ‘super-bananas’ project as a waste of money which will blind governments, research agencies and scientists to “biodiversity-based low-cost, safe, time-tested, democratic alternatives that are in the hands of women”.²²⁰

For the BMGF to truly base its programmes on farmers’ needs and on promoting social and economic justice in the global south would require a fundamental change in its corporate culture. At worst, the foundation often appears to be a massive, vertically integrated multinational corporation, controlling every step in a supply chain that reaches from its Seattle-based boardroom, through various stages of procurement, production, and distribution, to millions of ‘end-users’ in the villages of Africa and South Asia.²²¹

GRAIN’s research also found that of the \$669 million that the Gates Foundation has granted to NGOs for agricultural work, over three quarters has gone to organisations based in the US; Africa-based NGOs received just 4 per cent.²²²

4. Pushing privatisation

The foundation is pushing for privatisation of health and education services

Private sector influence on health and education has risen exponentially in recent years, especially with an increase in the role of large private foundations and public–private partnerships. The Gates Foundation has become one of the world’s leading funders of privatised healthcare in the global south. It also funds projects promoting an increasing role for private education providers.

Increasing the private sector’s role in basic services is highly controversial, in the UK as in developing countries. Although private health and education services exist in nearly all countries and can offer benefits for some people, they are not the focus that developing countries need. Publically provided, universally accessible, high quality education and healthcare should form the cornerstone of a society promoting a better life for its citizens. In developing countries, states must be empowered and funded to provide such services for all. The private provision of services, on the other hand, turns basic needs into commodities controlled by the market; such services are likely to be accessed mainly by the rich.²²³

There is extensive evidence that the promotion of markets in healthcare leads to an increase in health inequities and inefficiencies. However, despite such evidence, the privatisation of the health sector is being vigorously promoted by certain influential donors and corporations, and is a result of the strong influence the private sector wields on health policy-making.²²⁴ BMGF-funded programmes are making the private provision of basic services more acceptable, and more of a priority, in developing countries. The major beneficiaries will be the corporations providing such services.

Along with the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID), the Gates Foundation is the largest funder of Harnessing Non-state Actors for Better Health for the Poor, known as HANSHEP.²²⁵ HANSHEP, which is managed from the UK, is a group of development agencies and countries, established in 2010, seeking to improve the performance of the “non-state sector in delivering better healthcare”. HANSHEP addresses “government and/or market failures that prevent non-state actors from fulfilling their potential in health systems”.²²⁶ Its website states: “Increasing private sector share of the health market, in either financing or provision, is not an objective for HANSHEP members”.²²⁷ Yet this is disingenuous since the HANSHEP’s very purpose is to introduce and promote non-state healthcare in developing countries.

HANSHEP has various programmes promoting the private sector’s role in health. One is the African Health Markets for Equity partnership, a \$60 million joint BMGF/DFID investment whose aim is “to improve the access of the poor to high-quality private care”. Operating in Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana, this five year programme aims to “increase the scale and scope of franchised health care”, expanding from family planning and sexual and reproductive health to also address malaria, acute respiratory infections, diarrhoea, nutrition, maternal care, HIV and TB.²²⁸

Another HANSHEP scheme involves the Washington-based Center for Health Market Innovations (CHMI), “a global network of partners that seeks to improve the functioning of health markets in developing countries”. The Gates Foundation has funded over 40 CHMI projects.²²⁹ The CHMI promotes initiatives “that make quality health care delivered by private organizations affordable and accessible to the world’s poor”.²³⁰ It supports “innovative delivery and financing programs that work to organise health markets, including private sector delivery models”.



Melinda Gates addresses the UK's Department for International Development in 2010.

HANSHEP's CHMI programme is being implemented by the Results for Development (R4D) Institute, also funded by the BMGF, which also promotes private sector involvement in basic services.²³¹ R4D's Board members include Carla Hills, the former US Trade Secretary who currently serves on the international boards of JP Morgan Chase and Rolls Royce.²³²

The BMGF's support for privatised basic services also extends to education, a key grant area for the BMGF in the US. The BMGF's former CEO, Jeff Raikes, has explicitly said that US businesses

should play a greater role in the US education system and that "new types of partnerships and collaborations between and among educators and business" are needed.²³⁹ On this strategy, the foundation has been widely criticised by several American education professionals. For example, Diane Ravitch, an education historian and research professor at New York University has written of the BMGF's persistent funding of groups that want to privatise public education and those who are promoting an "anti-public education agenda in state after state".²⁴⁰

Why is the Gates Foundation supporting the International Finance Corporation?

The IFC is the World Bank's private sector arm, promoting private sector development in developing countries, and is already massively-resourced, with finances of \$16 billion in 2014.²³³ The IFC has long been criticised for promoting corporate interests, notably mining and agribusiness companies, in effect subsidising and expanding their operations in developing countries.²³⁴

The BMGF has awarded 11 grants to the IFC worth over \$40 million.²³⁵ Its largest grant, worth \$10 million and given in 2009, was to help the IFC "provide technical assistance to governments on the best way to interact with the private sector".²³⁶

The BMGF is also working in partnership with the IFC in the Health in Africa Fund, a private equity fund that invests in small and medium-sized private healthcare companies. In announcing the new initiative, the IFC said that the fund's purpose "includes improving the operating environment for companies" working in the African health sector.²³⁷

Promoting increased private sector interests in Africa can be the only reason why the BMGF is funding the IFC. Yet public-private partnerships in health have often been shown to be disasters. Oxfam's analysis of such a project in Lesotho, in which the IFC was the advisor, found that a hospital being built in the programme was consuming more than half of Lesotho's health budget, leaving few resources for tackling serious health problems in one of the world's poorest countries. Oxfam called on the IFC to halt its advisory work on health public-private partnerships until and unless the case has been fully and independently investigated.²³⁸

The BMGF is also a direct funder of British private education provider, Pearson, in what US education commentator, Anthony Cody, notes is a shift to increasingly promote "market domination" by the company in the US.²⁴¹ Pearson, which is being supported by DFID, is also seeking new markets in the global south and has profiled 11 countries where it states that "low-cost private schools offer quality education solutions".²⁴²

Some BMGF projects are supporting changes in regulations in developing countries to pave the way for more private provision of basic services. For example, the BMGF is a key member of the Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN), established in a 2007 meeting chaired by the Rockefeller Foundation by "a small group of investors to discuss the needs of the emergent impact investing industry".²⁴³

Impact investments have been described as "investments made into companies, organizations, and funds with the intention to generate social and environmental impact alongside a financial return".²⁴⁴ As a member of the GIIN's investors council, the BMGF sits alongside a range of US philanthropies and companies such as JP Morgan and Goldman Sachs.²⁴⁵ GIIN's Basic Services Programming Track, which focuses on South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, promotes "market solutions to fill the gap in provision" of basic services.²⁴⁶ One aspect of this programme is to "map... the policy and/or regulatory environment in which basic services investments take place".²⁴⁷ This could be the first stage in lobbying and advocacy to bring about environments more conducive to promoting the private provision of basic services.

Recommendations

1. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation should be the subject of an independent international review and evaluation. This could be managed and administered by the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD although this must involve a transparent commissioning process and include the participation of various stakeholders, notably those affected by foundation-funded projects.
2. The UK's International Development Select Committee should conduct an inquiry into the Department of International Development's relationship with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to assess the impact and effectiveness of any joint activity in addressing poverty and inequality.
3. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation needs to end its support for corporate controlled agricultural systems which promote reforms such as privatised seeds and encourages the widespread use of synthetic inputs that lead farmers to become dependent on purchasing expensive products every season.
4. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation should stop supporting all International Finance Corporation projects until serious concerns about the cost of its flagship public private hospital in Lesotho have been fully and independently investigated.

When contacted for its views on the report the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation provided us with the following:

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on your forthcoming report, but believe that it misrepresents the foundation, our work and our partnerships.

The foundation's mission is to improve quality of life for the world's poorest people. This is a complex challenge, and solving it will require a range of approaches as well as the collaboration of governments, NGOs, academic institutions, for-profit companies and philanthropic organizations. Governments are uniquely positioned to provide the leadership and resources necessary to address structural inequalities and ensure that the right solutions reach those most in need. The private sector has access to innovations – for example, in science, medicine and technology – that can save lives. And we believe that the role of philanthropy is to take risks where others can't or won't.

The good news is that by working together in this way we've made incredible progress. Since 1990, the world has cut extreme poverty, child mortality and malaria deaths by half, reduced maternal mortality by nearly 50 per cent, and driven new HIV infections down by 40 per cent. We believe that the next fifteen years will bring even more significant improvements.

In all of our work – whether helping women access life-saving prenatal care or ensuring that small holder farmers can produce enough food to feed their families – partners guide our priorities and approach. We listen to experts and practitioners and take action based on evidence. We were one of the first foundations to join the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), and our reporting to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), as well as our Open Access policy, reflect our commitment to the open exchange of information.

Finally, it's important to note that the endowment that funds the Gates Foundation is independently managed by a separate entity, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Trust. Foundation staff have no influence on the trust's investment decisions and no visibility into its investment strategies or holdings, other than through what is publicly available via required public disclosures.

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Global Justice Now campaigns for a world where resources are controlled by the many, not the few. We work in solidarity with social movements to fight injustice and inequality. We used to be the World Development Movement.

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