The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA and the occupation of the Guinea Savannah

Rural transformations and food systems: The BRICS and agrarian change in the global South
20-21 April 2015, Cape Town
Overview

• AGRA and ‘old hubs’ of capital
• The Green Revolution agenda and AGRA
• Land, seed and synthetic fertilizer
• AGRA and South African capital
• Conclusions
AGRA and ‘old hubs’ of capital

The US, EU and African agricultural modernisation

G8 New Alliance on Food Security and Nutrition (NAFSN), USAID and US foreign policy

AGRA – Gate Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation – philanthro-capitalism

Corporate drivers – Monsanto, Syngenta, Yara and many others

Gates – Monsanto shares, proprietary (privately-owned) technologies

Rockefeller – CGIAR institutions (2nd food regime)

World Bank – Guinea Savannah – “600 million ha ripe for commercial farming”
“increasing yields and expanding cultivated land in fertile areas already endowed with a minimum of essential infrastructure” - AGRA
SAGCOT and Beira Corridor
The Green Revolution agenda

Technological package

Institutions – legal, administrative, technical

Large-scale commercial farming, including plantation/contract farming arrangements

Recognition of importance of small-scale farming base in Africa

Two strategies:
  ◦ i) integrate into corporate chains for export
  ◦ ii) growth of commercial small-scale farming class, with increasing economies of scale over time
Green Revolution logic

Africa with huge resources but low productivity
Linear modernisation
Profit motive and competition as drivers of economy
Value chain approach
Subsidised inputs
Higher investments in land will “induce land holdings to adjust” (AGRA, 2013) – concentration in land holdings and dispossession

NAFSN and land – surveying and individual title

Surveying as the first step in commodification and alienation of land (Craib, 2004)

Irrigation and water
Seed

Majority of seed recycled – plasticity – adaptation to local socio-ecological context – built up by African producers themselves with some external input

Colonialism - introduction of ‘non-local’ crops like maize, European fruit and vegetables etc.

Green Revolution in US-led second food regime to increase yields – expansion of profitable markets for proprietary technologies

Role of CGIAR and USAID – long-term vision, patient build-up – seed breeding and production - towards commercialisation

Private seed companies following structural adjustment/liberalisation

But focus on ‘core’ profitable crops – “row crops amenable to industrialisation” (Aline O’Connor, AGRA consultant)

‘Orphan’ crops ignored – failure to meet strong but localised demand for diverse improved seed
Preparing the ground

Legal and policy frameworks – private ownership of land and germplasm – IP and PVP - regional harmonisation

Technical and governance structures

Education and R&D – AGRA (higher education, variety development)

Contradictory processes – is value in expanding this technical knowledge, but question of competitive, profit-seeking orientation

Inappropriate quality criteria

PPPs

AGRA and NAFSN – Scaling Seeds and Technologies Partnership (SSTP), seed enterprises
Synthetic fertilizer
SA capital and AGRA

SA government and BRICS

SA capital and ‘old hubs’

Directly working with AGRA: Standard Bank-managed agricultural investment fund, AgriSA/SACAU/PAFO, UKZN training, Senwes in Malawi
Conclusions

Occupation not only physical space, but also institutional space and assets
Altering seed systems and agricultural techniques
Directing public resources to supporting privatised profit
Advancement of some at the expense of others (e.g. land dispossession)
Alternative based on common, democratic ownership of resources and technologies, cooperation in economic activity, build on what exists rather than replacing

Thank you!

END