

Introduction

Critics claim that some of the world's largest agricultural biotechnology companies are prolonging world hunger by making their innovations, for which they charge high technology fees and establish exclusive intellectual property rights, inaccessible to the poor. The significant implication in such assertions is that these firms are not concerned with the public good.

Research Questions

- What are ag-biotech companies doing that could improve agriculture for poor farmers around the world?
- What kinds of projects are they investing in, how are they organized, and with whom are they partnering?
- What, specifically, do the companies contribute?
- What are the results? Do these projects produce technology that is both helpful *and* accessible to the poor?

Methods

- Investigated recent activities of Syngenta and the Monsanto Company
- Generated comprehensive list of projects
- Organized list into detailed tables
- Selected 3 projects as case studies for more in-depth investigation
- Assessed case studies in context of original research questions
- Compiled final report exploring case studies and discussing them in detail

Agricultural Biotechnology Companies and the Crops of the Poor

Mary A. Scott, College of Liberal Arts



Case Studies

Insect Resistant Maize for Africa (IRMA)

Company: Syngenta
Partners: CIMMYT; KARI; Rockefeller Foundation
Beneficiaries: Smallholder maize farmers in Kenya
Start Date: 1999

Virus Resistant Cassava for Africa (VIRCA)

Company: Monsanto
Partners: USAID; Donald Danforth Plant Science Center; NaCRRI
Beneficiaries: Smallholder cassava farmers in Kenya & Uganda
Start Date: 2006 (planning), 2009 (implementation)

Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA)

Company: Monsanto
Partners: AATF; CIMMYT; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Howard G. Buffett Foundation; BASF
Beneficiaries: Smallholder maize farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa
Start Date: 2008

Discussion & Conclusions

The realities behind critiques of ag-biotech companies are not so simple or straightforward. Many of these projects have the potential to serve, rather than hurt, the poor.

- Ag-biotech companies are investing in projects that acknowledge the needs of poor farmers by either targeting staple "orphan crops" or the specific needs of the region in which they are grown
- They do so in collaboration with a variety of nonprofits, NGOs, and other organizations in both the public and private sectors
- Corporate contributions vary; in some cases they are limited to funding, but in others relevant technologies and the licenses to use them have been donated directly
- Although these projects exhibit the potential to help the poor, they are still relatively new, and more research will be needed to fully assess the on-the-ground and long term impacts of the 3 case studies

Final research report and tables available upon request from scott555@umn.edu

Research conducted under the guidance of Professor Rachel Schurman of the Department of Sociology and funded by the U of M Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP)

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