

Yes, energize Africa's Green Revolution! Carry on Dr. Borlaug's work

By ACSH Staff — June 29, 2015



An *Opinionator* blog posting in the NYTimes entitled

[Energizing the Green Revolution in Africa](#) [1] discusses some of the agricultural techniques and technologies that have propelled the revolution in crop yields globally. Nobel Laureate Dr. Norman Borlaug developed and implemented the crop breeding and fertilization techniques given that appellation (Dr. Borlaug won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970, and is credited with saving approximately one billion lives from starvation. He was a founding Trustee of ACSH; he passed away at age 95 in 2009, still actively promoting modern agricultural technologies).

One of the main points in this review is that the Green Revolution has not penetrated African agriculture to the same extent as it has in Asia and Latin America, beginning in the 1950s. But inroads and progress has been accelerating of late: that's the tale told in this article. David Bornstein is the author his bailiwick at the Time is called *Fixes*.

Here is a key passage from the article: *In 2006, [Andrew Youn, an MBA student then] co-founded a nonprofit organization, One Acre Fund, with offices around East Africa, to assist smallholder farmers; today, the organization has a staff of 2,500 who deliver farming inputs, training and market assistance to 280,000 families in rural Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania, with a plan to be serving a million families by 2020.*

This work is part of a historic shift. 'The African Green Revolution is emerging,' said Pedro Sanchez, director of the Agriculture and Food Security Center at Columbia University's Earth Institute. 'In the last 10 years, yields of cereal grains like maize have increased by about 50 percent from 1 to 1.5 tons per hectare, but they're still pretty miserable.' (In Asia and Latin America, yields are 3 tons per hectare.) 'But it will happen, Sanchez adds. Many African countries are serious about this. The main barrier has been access to improved varieties of crops and fertilizers.

Also of importance: *Agnes Kalibata, a former minister of agriculture and animal resources for Rwanda...is now president of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, or AGRA. We need to create a value proposition around smallholder farmers for the private sector and the area that needs to be strengthened is the last mile solution. We need institutions like the One Acre Fund to reach farmers*

Dr. Gil Ross, American Council on Science and Health Senior Director of Medicine and Public Health, had this comment: This is an important article for anyone concerned about the health and nutrition of impoverished African farmers, many of whom are women working by themselves to feed their families. The author explores many reasons for the slower uptake of Green Revolution techniques promulgated by our late co-founder, Norman Borlaug, and how many of these are gradually being overcome with the help of dedicated NGOs such as the One Acre Fund and AGRA. I personally was quite disturbed, however, when I concluded my perusal to find not a mention of Dr. Borlaug nor of the vast potential of biotechnology genetically-engineered/GMO agricultural technologies to contribute to the progress of increasing crop yields for starving sub-Saharan Africans. However, I must say that I subsequently clicked on a link Mr. Bornstein provided regarding drought-tolerant crops , and found Tina Rosenberg s thorough [paean to Dr. Borlaug](#) [2] from 2014. (Unfortunately, she also neglected entirely the subject of how genetic engineering can help ward off malnutrition).

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Links

[1] <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/06/26/energizing-the-green-revolution-in-africa/>

[2] <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/04/09/a-green-revolution-this-time-for-africa/>