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Gates Foundation

Bill Gates fails to address concerns on Foundation's investments



Bill Gates addressed the Development committee of the European Parliament last week and received a warm welcome from the MEPs present. The questions that followed his address were light and easy with [one exception](#): Green MEP [Catherine Grèze](#) challenged Mr. Gates on the funding of his foundation, and if its investments are making some problems even worse. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has the noble dual global aims of enhancing healthcare and reducing extreme poverty. Yet the investments that help to fund this work are exacerbating problems in the poorest countries around the world. [The Foundation](#) is the largest [transparently operated](#) private foundation in the world. Driven by "the interests and passions of the Gates family" ([1](#)), the foundation is involved in the health and agriculture sectors with the aims of reducing hunger and providing vaccines to eradicate diseases such as Polio. It also finances research on HIV/AIDS and Malaria. In contrast though, when it comes to the investments the foundation makes to fund this work, the primary motivator is profitability. In the weeks prior to his address to Parliament, the [Los Angeles Times](#) and French news show [Envoyé Spécial](#) highlighted some of the contradictions between the declared objectives of the Gates foundation and its selection of investments based solely on return. In the case of investments in large Oil companies such as Total, the gains made by the Gates foundation's health campaigns, such as polio vaccinations and research on HIV/AIDS, are being overcome by disastrous impacts on the environment. In the [Ogoni](#) region of Nigeria, the land is contaminated, the rivers are polluted and the people of the Niger Delta can no longer fish, cultivate crops or drink water safely. This situation only deteriorates further with the rise in the oil companies' activities. When it comes to reducing hunger, similar contradictions exist. In 2006, the Bill & Melinda Gates and Rockefeller Foundations launched a research centre, the [Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa](#) (AGRA), based in Nairobi. The Agricultural research centre has the objective of improving seeds and feeding the people. However, one of the objectives of the research centre is to bring changes to existing laws to accept GMOs. The first victory was achieved in Kenya, where GMO cotton cultivation was recently [authorised](#). As a partner of

GMO manufacturer Monsanto, the Gates foundation is introducing GMO in Africa. The biggest worry for farmers is losing control of their seeds, a right threatened by Monsanto's distribution of patented seeds to farmers to discourage them from saving seeds, a practice as old as agriculture itself. A lot of farmers associations and civil society organisations have not been involved in deciding what is best for African farmers. Green MEP Catherine Grèze [put these concerns](#) to Bill Gates when he addressed the Development Committee of the European Parliament. Unfortunately, Bill Gates ignored the question on oil companies [completely and failed to address](#) the main point of the Greens' question on farmers losing control of their seeds. The late [Wangari Maathai](#) of the [Green Belt Movement](#) Kenya warned in [1998](#) "patenting of life forms and the genetic engineering, which it stimulates, is being justified because it will benefit society, especially the poor, by providing better and more food and medicine. However, in fact, by monopolizing the 'raw' biological materials, the development of other options is deliberately blocked. Farmers therefore, become totally dependent on the corporations for seeds." The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation can follow the example set by the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation and make social justice, corporate governance and environmental stewardship key considerations in their investment strategies(2). Other foundations have shown that profitability and corporate social responsibility can go hand in hand, leading to healthy returns to fund the challenging and necessary work of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This work must continue, but not on the back of eroding its own gains. We hope that when Bill Gates next visits the European Parliament, he won't have to dodge the only difficult question he faces.

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