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Daniel Howden: Hope for Africa lies in political reforms

There is already famine in Africa but it is not the fault of the Soil Association or British organic food markets. Up to 14 million people in the Horn of Africa are at risk of starvation and this has little to do with Western-imposed attitudes to organic farming. Millions more are suffering in Zimbabwe, and food riots have flared from Egypt to Mozambique. The root of the problem in almost every case is political, not scientific.

For agriculture in Africa, the real problems stem from a global trade system that favours richer countries and large corporations, chronic under-investment by corrupt governments, and the gross distortion of food prices caused in large part by the explosion of biofuels.

Trade inequality has seen rich countries dumping subsidised food on to African markets, while erecting barriers themselves. Now prime African farmland is being switched from food to fuel – on the most food-insecure continent on the planet.


Making matters worse is the prospect of African governments selling off prime farmland to wealthy countries such as Saudi Arabia, creating the horrifying prospect of fortified farms exporting food from starving countries. The agribusiness giants who have developed and patented genetically modified crops have long argued that their mission is to feed the world, rarely missing an opportunity to mention starving Africans.

Their mission is, in fact, to make a profit.

Land rights for small farmers, political stability, fairer markets, education and investment hold the key to feeding Africa but offer little prospect of increased profits.

The climate crisis was used to boost biofuels, helping to create the food crisis; and now the food crisis is being used to revive the fortunes of the GM industry.

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