Some say GMOs answer to hunger in Africa, critics claim seed companies just want new market

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The promise of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is a tempting one for African countries. Extreme weather conditions and rapidly growing demand place African farmers under great pressure to increase productivity. Africa depends heavily on food aid and imports. With a population set to double to 2.4 billion by 2050, ending this dependence has become of crucial importance.

Many see GMOs as an indispensable tool to confront the challenge of providing food security for Africa. This approach is backed by the United States, which produces around 40 percent of the world's GM crops.

The public-private partnership Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA) aims to develop varieties of the crop that can withstand both droughts and attack by insects. One variety, produced by American seed company Monsanto, is due to be planted in South Africa from 2017. The objective is simple: to make crops more durable in drought-afflicted countries and boost productivity by 20 to 30 percent, according to estimates.

"GMOs are overwhelmingly presented as innovations to fight hunger in sub-Saharan Africa. But their main purpose is to open new markets for the big international seed companies, who see Africa as a future market," warned Clara Jamart, food security advocacy officer for Oxfam France.

While GM crops are authorised in only a handful of African countries today, they appear to be gaining in popularity.

This new enthusiasm for GMOs is strongly encouraged by the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition (NASAN), an organisation launched by the G8 in 2012 to promote the adoption, distribution and consumption of bio-fortified foods in developing countries. Its objective is to fight malnutrition by improving the nutritional value of foods.

Read full, original post: GMOs take root as a controversial answer to hunger in Africa