



Stop the corporate takeover of African food

The UK government is helping corporations take over African agriculture in the name of tackling hunger. This will help big business make vast profits, while small scale farmers risk losing control of their land, livelihoods and ability to feed themselves and their communities. It's time the UK government supported food sovereignty for people in Africa, not corporate profit.

The scramble for Africa's food system

UK aid money is funding a corporate takeover of African agriculture. In the same way as when Europeans colonised much of the continent in the nineteenth century, large corporations are now looking for raw materials, land and labour. The UK and other rich countries are promoting initiatives that will guarantee vast profit for these companies under the guise of tackling hunger and poverty.

For example, in 2012 the G8 launched the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition. The New Alliance promises to boost farming in African countries whose governments have signed up to the initiative. Alongside aid from G8 countries, large corporations pledge to invest in African agriculture. In return, African countries are required to reform land, seed and trade rules to suit the needs of big business.

What is wrong with corporate-led agriculture?

Large corporations are gaining increasing power over the global food system at the expense of small scale farmers. Around the world, small scale farmers have lost their land to large corporations and foreign investors or become dependent on corporations for farming inputs like seeds. Big businesses have taken control of markets, squeezing many small scale farmers out of their livelihoods. Yet, almost one billion people remain chronically malnourished worldwide partly because the corporate-controlled food system prioritises profit over providing nutritious and accessible food for poor communities.

Big agribusiness is also bad news for the planet. Intensive planting and harvesting, large scale growth of single crops and use of chemical fertilisers have damaged ecosystems, reduced biodiversity and degraded soil. Industrial farming is now a key contributor to climate change due to fossil fuel use and deforestation.

Who is in the New Alliance?

G8 countries: These include Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, UK and the US, along with the European Union. G8 countries have pledged billions of pounds in aid. As of early 2014, the UK had pledged £600m.

African countries: These include Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Benin, Malawi, Nigeria and Senegal. They have signed up to receive investment and aid.

Corporations: Over 50 multinational corporations are pledging investments, including UK-based global consumer goods giant Unilever and British alcoholic drinks companies Diageo and SABMiller. African companies are also pledging investments.

'The practical results of the recent surge in investment in African agriculture expose the empty rhetoric of African food security. Blatant land grabs are well known across the continent (...). Meanwhile actual farmers are separated from the land and the only realistic option for a livelihood.'

Statement by civil society groups in Africa, 2013



Feeding corporate profit

The G8's New Alliance and similar initiatives claim to improve access to food and nutrition for African states. Yet in reality they will shift control of the food system away from small scale farmers and local communities and into the hands of big business. Here are some of the ways that the New Alliance is helping to feed corporate profit:



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Controlling seeds

Many of the African countries signed up to the New Alliance are making changes to their laws which make it easier for large seed companies to operate. Corporate seeds, which include genetically modified (GM) seeds, are patented. This means farmers are prevented from the age-old practice of saving and using seeds the following year. Small scale farmers are often locked into contracts to buy seeds again from the same company, leading to indebtedness and poverty. Changes in seed laws could also mean that small scale farmers lose their freedom to save and exchange their own varieties of seeds which they have done for generations.

Removing trade regulations

In return for New Alliance investments, some African governments are removing trade regulations. For example, Ethiopia, Malawi and Tanzania have pledged to stop using export bans. These bans can help governments keep enough staple food in the country to feed their populations, especially in times of emergency.



Export crops

Many corporations in the New Alliance have pledged to invest in crops intended for export such as coffee, tobacco and biofuel crops. These crops are grown for profit, not nutrition. They are not intended for local consumption and instead force countries to rely on volatile international markets for food. Prices can become unpredictable and poor consumers can struggle to afford to eat.

Land grabbing

African states in the New Alliance are making changes to their land rules that will open the door for corporations and foreign investors to take control of land and the resources on it. This is known as land grabbing. Throughout Africa, many communities have lost land to corporations, depriving them of their livelihoods and natural resources. Mozambique has already leased over 20 per cent of its agricultural land to companies and foreign investors. Ethiopia has leased over 8 per cent. Yet both countries, along with others, are making policy changes that will help corporations acquire more land.

Agricultural growth corridors – a wholesale corporate takeover

As part of the New Alliance and other initiatives, countries including Ethiopia, Mozambique and Tanzania are creating zones for large scale farms to grow cash crops and developing the infrastructure for their export. These zones are known as growth corridors. They put small scale farmers' land and livelihoods at risk. In Tanzania, the Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor (SAGCOT) is set to cover 7.5 million hectares of farm land. Although the Tanzanian government supports the project, it has warned of land grabs by corporations and a risk to farmers' livelihoods in the SAGCOT region.



Resisting corporate control

The UN estimates that there is enough food being produced worldwide to feed 12 billion people. Global hunger stems not from a lack of food or a growing population, but how food is controlled and distributed. Where food is grown purely for global markets by corporations, it reaches those who can afford it and profits those who are in control.

Small scale farmers produce 70 per cent of the world's food. Around 80 per cent of farms in sub-Saharan Africa are small scale. Many farmers in Africa currently struggle to make an income and many are in poverty. This is partly because they do not have the government support they need to operate and cannot compete with the large corporations who control their resources and the markets they sell to. But in some countries government support and market regulation, along with aid, has helped make small scale farming a secure and decent livelihood. Policies that support small scale, environmentally friendly farming practices have helped farmers in Brazil and Cuba to increase yields sustainably. Land reform and strong land rights for smallholders, like in Venezuela, can also help small scale farmers.



Around the world small scale farmers and activists, including international peasant movement La Via Campesina, are calling for food sovereignty. This is a more just and sustainable food system in which food is considered a right not just a commodity, control of food and resources lie with those who produce and consume food, and farming works in balance with nature. These groups are demanding that the small scale farming that feeds the majority of the world's population is protected from corporate takeover.

Around the world, farmers and activists are organising for food sovereignty and against the corporate takeover of the food system.

In 2013, the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa and almost 100 other African civil society groups called on the G8 to end its "new wave of colonialism" through initiatives like the New Alliance that threaten a "flow of royalties out of Africa into the hands of multinational corporations".

WDM is standing in solidarity with these groups in Africa who are demanding an end to the corporate takeover of agriculture. We are calling on the UK government to stop funding the G8's New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition and instead support food sovereignty.



'Food sovereignty is the fundamental right of all peoples, nations and states to control food and agricultural systems and policies, ensuring every one has adequate, affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food (...) Food sovereignty wrests control over our commons back into the hands of the people.'

*International peasant movement
La Via Campesina, Jakarta 2013*



What can you do?

The UK government must stop using aid to support the corporate takeover of African agriculture. The UK is currently pushing an agenda which promotes profit for big business at the expense of small scale farmers who already feed most of the population. Instead, UK aid should be directed to where it best helps people out of poverty. This includes supporting Africa's small scale farmers to grow food sustainably and enabling local communities to control their own food systems.

WDM is calling on the UK government to:

- Stop its funding and support for pro-corporate initiatives like the G8's New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition
- Introduce policies that support food sovereignty

You can help stop the corporate takeover of Africa's agriculture. To find out how you can take action and for updates visit www.wdm.org.uk/food, or search [#agribusiness](#) on Twitter.



The World Development Movement (WDM) campaigns for a world without poverty and injustice. We work in solidarity with activists around the world to tackle the causes of poverty. We research and promote positive alternatives that put the rights of poor communities before the interests of big business.

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