IIED urges G8 to see transparency as critical step on road to accountability

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Transparency is one of David Cameron’s three big ideas for the world leaders to focus on when the UK hosts the annual G8 summit on 17-18 June 2013. The idea is that more transparency — for instance, in the deals that give companies access to land and natural resources in Africa, Asia and Latin America — can help to increase accountability, equity and sustainable development.

Much secrecy surrounds these deals. They often create environmental and social problems for local communities or leave little in the way of benefits. The secret nature of the deals can encourage corruption and tax evasion. It excludes citizens from decisions about local natural resources. Rather than helping to tackle poverty, bad deals can impoverish local communities.

Over several years, IIED’s research has made big contributions to policy debates about transparency and governance in land acquisitions and extractive industries. IIED thinks that while the G8 can act to improve the current situation, the summit’s decision could also be weak and misguided.

IIED urges the G8 to see transparency not as a destination but as a critical step on the road to accountability and fair and sustainable development. Information alone is not enough. People need to be able to access and use the information and this is something the G8 leaders can promote and support in concrete ways.

Dr Emma Wilson, senior researcher at IIED, says: “A decade since the launch of the Publish What You Pay campaign and the [Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative](http://www.iied.org/study-shows-how-improve-extractive-industries-transparency-initiative) (EITI), the question remains of how to [make transparency work for sustainable development](http://www.iied.org/transparency-can-it-work-for-sustainable-development). G8 leaders need to see transparency not as an end-goal, but as the means to an end. Transparency needs to increase accountability in natural resource management.”

“Transparency needs to empower local people affected by resource extraction projects,” says Wilson. “Ultimately it must promote sustainable development based on effective management of those resources. New US and EU legislation – the US Dodd-Frank Act and the EU transparency and accounting directives – will enter into effect in the coming years. This means that a lot more information will become publicly available. People affected by resource extraction projects or land investments need to be able to access the information that the various transparency initiatives gather.”

“Online access to company and government reporting is a good start, but efforts need to be made to create compelling and easy-to-understand information for local populations, so that they can use it to hold industry, investors and government to account. Civil society organisations have a critical role to play in this, and donors and governments should support these efforts. An important new pathway for transparency initiatives is to make linkages with other environmental and social development initiatives, including government programmes, international campaigns and development programmes, and local civil society initiatives promoting protection of the environment, local livelihoods, human rights, and access to land and resources.”

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Transparency in large-scale land deals

Dr Lorenzo Cotula, senior researcher at IIED, says: “European and North American companies drive much of the land acquisition underway in lower-income countries, so G8 leaders have an important responsibility. Their interest in tackling large land deals is a step forward. But [while transparency is crucial, it is not enough](http://www.iied.org/global-land-rush-contract-transparency-crucial-not-enough). Public decisions on agricultural investments such as large-scale land deals should reflect local aspirations about rural development. This requires effective arrangements and robust capacity for bottom-up deliberation on which investments to promote and how. It also requires [public accountability throughout investment processes](http://www.iied.org/gaining-ground-report-sheds-light-demand-for-accountability-amid-resistance-land-deals-africa). And as competition for land and resources increases, it is critical that local people have strong rights and means of redress, which can balance and complement the effective protection available to foreign investors.”

How lack of food security is failing a starving world

Starvation is a symptom of a larger problem involving land, health, power and ecological damage, say experts

Last week another 1 million children under five were declared dead because of [malnutrition](http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/malnutrition). This was not because of another famine or a new disease, but simply that an eminent panel of doctors and academics working for the *Lancet* published findings that showed the [existing research on child mortality had got it wrong](http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2013/jun/06/malnutrition-3-million-deaths-children).

So the tens of thousands of anti-hunger campaigners who met in Hyde Park yesterday should not have been spreading 2 million paper petals for each of those dead children – but 3.1 million. And the awful IF campaign headline statistic – that a child dies from hunger every 15 seconds – should have been "every 10 seconds".

These tragic figures are a big disappointment to a world that believes it is doing rather well on profound [poverty](http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/poverty). The numbers of humans living on less than $1.25 a day will be halved by 2015, a success for a Millennium Development Goal target set in 2000. But it turns out that, contrary to the wisdom of a generation of economists, growth does not necessarily reduce hunger, especially among the world's poorest. Child malnutrition has increased in India in the past decade, despite its economic boom. The world still has more than enough food – but distributing it fairly, or even humanely, is not simple at all.

[The *Lancet* report](http://www.thelancet.com/series/maternal-and-child-nutrition) was released to give a push to Saturday's half-day summit on [nutrition](http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/nutrition) and growth, called by [David Cameron](http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/davidcameron) ahead of the [G8](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/g8) wealthy nations meeting in Ireland later this month. "Food security" is an agenda item there, though pushed lower than it was at the beginning of the year.

But the London mini-summit – attended by no significant G8 figure other than Cameron himself – is more evidence that the ability of grand red-carpet summits to address issues such as world food supply may be over. Both the G20 and the G8 have proved big on promises but not so hot on delivery.

In 2009 at the Aquila G8 summit, [Barack Obama](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/barack-obama) launched a plan to boost the world's poorest farmers as a route to improving world food security. The G8 nations lined up to pledge an impressive $22bn to the plan. But analysis by the One anti-poverty campaign now shows that two thirds of that money was "double spending" – aid money already committed – and the G8's own analysis shows that 26% of the money committed has not materialised. Despite all the talk in the years since Aquila, aid spending on African [agriculture](http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/agriculture) has gone up only a couple of percentage points.

When it comes to addressing the systemic problems that threaten world food security, the big powers now seem puny. One key cause of the food price rises of 2008 and 2010-11 was the panicky bans on grain exports imposed by [Russia](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/russia) and others when their harvests looked doubtful. That spooked the commodities markets, excited the speculators and sent prices soaring – despite no underlying lack of food.

But the World Trade Organisation's talks have been stalled for five years, offering no mechanism for a global trade initiative to stabilise food prices.

It is interesting that against this muddle and lack of accountability – another issue on the G8 agenda – one couple at yesterday's summit, Bill and Melinda Gates, are provably spending $370m a year on the poorest farmers – providing technical help and developing new, climate-change-tolerant crops. These are the measures that, all analysts agree, can make a real difference to hunger, while also reducing [Africa](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/africa)'s dependence on food imports. The Gates Foundation has also backed an initiative from African nations, who came together in 2003 to pledge 10% of their national budgets to agriculture. Ten years on, 24 are signed, though only four have yet met their targets. Nevertheless the mortality in sub-Saharan Africa is down 18% since 2005.

The grandstanding aid strategies led by old, rich, world governments do begin to look out of date. Besides, the coffers are not as full as they used to be. So those attending yesterday's London nutrition summit were largely developing country leaders and people from the business world, including [Bill Gates](http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/billgates) and the CEO of Unilever, Paul Polman, gathered because of a 2012 G8 initiative, New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition. Set up to combine the forces of African businesses and governments with those of rich nations, it is said already to have raised $4bn of private money.

Targeting specific issues around food that can get tangible results seems to make sense. Despite the awful statistics on child death, there have been stunning gains in child nutrition. According to the *Lancet*'s research, a quarter of children in the poorest countries are stunted now, in brain or body. But that figure was 40% in 1990. So, largely as a result of healthcare improvements and breast-feeding, the one quarter of a billion children maimed by hunger has dropped to 165 million today, despite population increase.

Reducing child malnutrition-related deaths further may be quite easily achieved. And Bill Gates was upbeat at yesterday's summit about the approach and the benefits. "When children don't get the right nutrition in the first 1,000 days – from the start of a woman's pregnancy until her child's second birthday – it affects not only their growth, but their brain development. From that point on, no matter how much we invest in the education of that child, they simply won't achieve their potential. And neither will their country." He said 20% of children are stunted before they're born – but giving their mothers the right foods, vitamins and minerals can prevent that.

This is why [Justine Greening](http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/justine-greening), secretary of state for development, launched a vitamin-rich "super potato" on Friday, intended to be grown by 3 million developing world farmers, whose children are in danger of blindness and anaemia. Funding for development of the sweet potato has come from the UK government and (you guessed it) the Gates Foundation.

But a former government adviser on sustainable development, Professor Tim Lang of City University, is critical of this narrow approach to the world's growing food supply problem. He told the *Observer*: "We've had many summits talking about hunger since the oil and commodity price spike of 2007-08, rightly, but not enough has happened to change the food system. My worry is that this one is shifting policy focus away from the complex picture of how food connects land, health, power and ecological damage. Technical fixes like food supplements may appear sensible, but they do little to address the systemic problems.

"David Cameron is on safe ground expressing concern about starving babies, because no one could possibly object to addressing that scandal. The unpalatable truth is that there are 870 million people starving, 2 billion malnourished and 1.4 billion overweight and obese. What I want to see is political leaders accepting that their task is to recalibrate the food system entirely. We have to recivilise food capitalism and recalibrate markets."

Some NGOs object to corporates' involvement in the New Alliance. But a big cause of comment yesterday was that the really important player in food was not on the guest list. That's [China](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/china) – Africa's biggest trading partner and likely to have no malnourished citizens by 2020. And that, oddly, is a real threat to the world's future food supply.

China's meat consumption has quadrupled over 20 years, an inevitable result of a wealthier population. And that means more of the world's crops going to feed animals, already consuming 40% of all the grains we farm.

In March this year, the world's biggest traffic jam appeared off [Brazil](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/brazil) – 212 of the largest freight ships, some of them a third of a kilometre long, were waiting to load soy beans and soy meal after Brazil's greatest harvest ever. The queue of lorries from the Mato Grosso taking soy to the port of Santos stretched 15 miles. When they finally loaded – and the delay caused hiccups in the world soy price – most of the ships were headed to deliver their protein-rich food to be eaten by Chinese pigs, fish and chickens.

Whatever measures to tackle the problem of 870 million malnourished people are announced by the G8 this month, without China's commitment they lack much significance. It's a bit like ordering supper before the big guy arrives at the table.

Eight ways to solve world hunger

Millions of people are starving, despite the world producing more than enough to feed everyone. What can we do about it?

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2013/jun/08/eight-ways-solve-world-hunger>

**PREVENT LAND GRABBING**

An ugly side of current scares over future food supply is wealthy, land-poor states, like those in the Gulf and South Korea, acquiring tracts of undeveloped countries to use as allotments. It is a campaigning cause of the multi-charity IF campaign against hunger. Ethiopia, Sudan, Madagascar and Cambodia have been targeted and a total area the size of Spain may already have been acquired.

**Problem:** Hard to police. Difficult to distinguish between genuine investment in Africa and the expropriation of land from the poor who need it to grow their food. **Chances: 3/10**

**BLOCK THE SPECULATORS**

Photograph: Mario Tama/Getty Images

Huge sums of investment fund money have flooded into the commodities markets since the financial crisis, looking for returns no longer available in equities. Automated trading systems that exploit tiny flaws in the market and encourage volatility make it impossible for traditional traders to keep prices stable and hedge against spikes.

**Problem:** Much discussed in the G20 and G8, an international agreement on reforming and regulating the commodities markets looks no nearer than when the problem was first identified. Banks and investors have marshalled strong arguments against interference. **Chances: 3/10**

**PRODUCE LESS BIOFUEL**

Photograph: Michael Wald/Alamy

The pressure to achieve targets on reduced carbon emissions from fossil fuel has seen rich countries turning sugar, maize and other food crops into ethanol and biodiesel.

**Problems:** Many economists doubt how important this issue really is in food price rises. Food and fuel prices are inextricably linked, so producing biofuel may lower food prices. A proportion of food crops have always been used for energy – 100 years ago 10% of the world's grain went to feeding horses. Second-generation [biofuels](http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/biofuels) won't use food crops, but wood, stalks and other waste. **Chances: 1/10**

**STOP THE MEAT FEAST**

Photograph: Andrey Armyagov/Alamy

Meat production is a wasteful use of the planet's limited resources – even today, 40% of grain crops are going to feed livestock and fish. It is most inefficient with intensive beef [farming](http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/farming), where it has been shown that just 2.5% of the feed given to cattle emerges as calories for our consumption.

That is why the UN says agricultural production will have to rise 60% to feed the extra 2 billion mouths in 2050.

**Problems:** There is no international mechanism to regulate or alter collective human diets, and no models other than famine that have ever worked. **Chances: 0/10**

**SUPPORT SMALL FARMERS**

Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Most African farmers are less productive than a US farmer was 100 years ago. There is a consensus between NGOs and governments that supporting and training small farmers is the best possible solution to future [food security](http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/food-security). A combination of aid, education in low-tech methods such as better rice planting and irrigation, and the introduction of better seeds and fertilizer could spark a green revolution in Africa, such as the one that transformed South Asia in the 20th century.

**Problem:** Rich countries have proved poor at delivering on their aid pledges. Genetically modified crops are already part of these schemes.

**Chances: 8/10**

**TARGET INFANT** [**NUTRITION**](http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/nutrition)

Photograph: Hoberman Collection/UIG via Getty Images

"Eliminating [malnutrition](http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/malnutrition) is achievable. It's within our reach," Bill Gates told the London summit, and many companies and rich nations are backing an African government-led plan to tackle it. Big improvements have already been made. The solution lies in education on good feeding techniques and getting the right nutrients to the mother and child from the beginning of pregnancy. Overall, malnutrition makes people poorer – it is responsible for an 11% decline in GDP in affected countries.

**Problem:** Critics say it diverts policy makers' attention from the job of solving the systemic problems in food supply.

**Chances: 9/10**

**ROLL OUT BIOTECH**

Photograph: Wayne Hutchinson/Alamy

Huge gains could be available for health and agricultural productivity if the promises of genetic modification can be believed. Gene-splicing crops to help them withstand drought and flood may be vital. Pigs and chickens could have their digestive systems altered so that they eat food not required by humans, and pollute the environment less.

**Problem:** There are risks with the technology, and no satisfactory regulatory system in place. Public distaste at the idea of GM, especially in Europe, is holding up research and stopping investment. Safer ideas, like stem cell meat fed on algae, are still far from production. **Chances: 6/10**

**REDUCE** [**POVERTY**](http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/poverty)

Economic growth has long been seen as the key to reducing hunger. More trade, financial liberalisation and open markets should aid the flow of food, of which there's no overall shortage. Successful poverty reduction in China has led some economists to predict there will be no more hungry people there by 2020.

**Problems:** Not easy to organise, with the west in economic recession and aid spending falling. More importantly, economic growth does not necessarily trickle down to the hungry poor.Child malnutrition has increased in India during the past decade despite the country's boom.

**Chances: 2/10**

G8 needs reminding the market doesn't know best when it comes to hunger

Partnerships with food giants such as Monsanto and Unilever will not eradicate hunger – and they might well make it worse

David Cameron's attempt to detoxify the Conservative party has rested on a set of policies that include supporting gay marriage, encouraging women into public office and increasing international aid.

In many ways the last of these has been most successful – and the government has drawn few attacks from the opposition for its development policy, as it has increased the aid budget even while making harsh cuts elsewhere.

This week Cameron attempts to gild his image on the global stage when he chairs the G8 summit. He has long waited for his "Blair moment", at which some of the razzmatazz of the last British G8 – in 2005 at Gleneagles – is recreated, if somewhat toned down to suit a time of austerity.

A centrepiece of Cameron's G8 was the "[hunger summit](http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2013/jun/08/london-hunger-summit-child-malnutrition)", at the weekend, at which politicians from around the world came to plan the "eradication of hunger". Nobody can deny the ambition of that goal. But that does not mean we should applaud any policies that claim to be able to reach it.

The policies that the hunger summit endorsed will not eradicate hunger – and they might well make it worse. They are based on the same principle that guides all of the government's development thinking – namely the idea that "the market knows best". That's why African farmers' movements rejected a major component of the hunger summit – the [New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition](http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2013/jun/08/food-security-failing-starving-world). This alliance was launched at the last G8 and promises to increase investment in agriculture through "partnerships" with food giants such as Monsanto, Syngenta, Cargill and Unilever.

On Saturday, as the New Alliance added three African countries to the current six, anti-poverty groups including [Jubilee Debt Campaign](http://www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk/), [Friends of the Earth](http://www.foe.co.uk/) and [War on Want](http://www.waronwant.org/), demanded that the British government withhold the £395m of aid that it has pledged. Africa's farmers labelled it a "[new wave of colonialism](http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2013/jun/07/g8-new-alliance-flawed-project)" because countries taking part in new alliance pilots are told, for instance, to make it easier for foreign corporations to buy up agricultural land and end trade protection.

This route to eradicating global hunger was tried and failed many times in the heyday of the British empire. It cost millions of lives on the Indian subcontinent in the 19th and 20th centuries, as support and protection for ordinary farmers was ended and food distribution was dictated by the market. Food was exported and stockpiled to attain higher prices, even while local populations starved to death.

Hunger is no more a result of food shortage today than it was then. The "market knows best" policies have not delivered food to the hungry. Real solutions are out there. A UN process (through the committee on world food security) is working to develop a set of principles to challenge the control of food systems. Massive grassroots networks, such as [La Via Campesina](http://viacampesina.org/en/), are working for "food sovereignty": the right to have not just access to food, but control of the food system. It calls for land redistribution, a focus on domestic production, collective and organic farming and public support for farmers.

The concentration of power in the hands of corporations, especially financial business, is at the core of global injustices such as the deprivation of food. Yet across the board, the British government sees these behemoths as the solution to injustice.

Large numbers of the British public have marched and campaigned for a fairer distribution of power and wealth in the world. It is an insult if the very tools that they have defended – such as the development department and its budget – are used in a way that makes the world less fair.

G8 summits have traditionally seen campaigners get on the streets to question who holds the reins of global power. Why is it that eight countries have such a say over the lives of 7 billion people? Rather than giving Cameron a "golden moment", we must [use the G8 to reclaim the development agenda](http://enoughfoodif.org/events) as a broad-based call for social justice.

G8 vision for tackling hunger wilfully ignores the politics of malnutrition

Poor nutrition is a symptom of poverty and always has been; in portraying it as a technical issue, the G8 is fooling no one

Over centuries, modern agriculture has [bred the nutrients out of our food](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/26/opinion/sunday/breeding-the-nutrition-out-of-our-food.html). The G8 will next week try to go one further – within a generation, they want to squeeze the politics out of hunger. If they succeed, they'll have licensed an army of development technicians who'll be free of democracy, accountability or history.

A good place to see this power grab was at the nutrition for growth summit, held at Unilever's London headquarters on Saturday. Watch the proceedings, and it all seems pretty benign. Rich countries and corporations will give a bit of cash. Bill Gates' foundation will fix the problem of nutrition with supplements, breastfeeding classes and vitamin-enriched sweet potatoes, and all will live happily ever after. The only reason this hasn't happened yet is a deficit of political will – measured in financial commitments to [aid](http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/aid). (Big applause greeted Gates' announcement of half a billion dollars in funding.)

Tackling poor nutrition is, of course, important. Malnutrition accounts for one third of deaths among children under five. Few can now dispute the lifelong [importance of good nutrition in the first 1,000 days of life](http://www.thelancet.com/series/maternal-and-child-nutrition), from conception to age two.

One of the things about inadequate nutrition is that it generally affects people who are poor. Although many campaigners and epidemiologists have [pointed this out](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20691525), it was [almost impossible to hear the connection between malnutrition and poverty](http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2013/06/real-winners-todays-hunger-summit) at the summit. This isn't an innocent omission. This is how nutrition becomes what anthropologist James Ferguson calls an anti-political device. It turns a symptom of poverty into the ends of policy.

It's not easy to take a complex question – one that needs democratic debate, mechanisms of accountability, and principles of justice – and convince people that it's a purely technical matter. But business and governments have been doing their best to "nutritionise" development.

Here, for example, is David Cameron explaining why Britain has taken a [leadership role in international development spending](https://event.webcasts.com/viewer/event.jsp?ei=1017869): "It's because of the kind of people we [the British] are – and the kind of country we are. We are the kind of people who believe in doing what is right." Britannia's children have unblemished souls. Except, of course, for the British empire, [which caused India's economic collapse](http://www.hindu.com/2005/07/10/stories/2005071002301000.htm), and left south Asia a legacy of more malnourished children than anywhere else. To rewrite the past and render malnutrition a simply technical problem is to dissolve history like a tooth in cola.

Speaking of which, corporations are doing their bit in service of the nutrition narrative too. In 2007, the Coca-Cola Company tried to address criticism from public health advocates that Coke isn't very healthy. It launched Diet Coke Plus, a patent blend of Diet Coke plus a dusting of vitamins and minerals. The nutritional "plus" was so meagre that the drink [earned an admonishment from the normally supine Food and Drug Administration](http://www.fda.gov/ICECI/EnforcementActions/WarningLetters/2008/ucm1048050.htm) for misleading the public.

Coke's nutrition farce is being transformed into the answer to the tragedy of malnutrition. Diet Coke Plus is, after all, the perfect marriage of science and business, designed to increase growth and fight poor nutrition. It doesn't involve the messiness of history or accountability or debt. All it needs is the level playing field being bulldozed by the G8's policy initiatives.

The vision offered by G8 leaders will be one in which [business needs to be free to "modernise" agriculture](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/jun/10/african-hunger-help-g8-grab), particularly in [Africa](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/africa), by being able to buy land, sell chemicals, privatise genetic material. Dozens of African groups announced that they weren't pleased about their children's poverty being used as a pretext for "a new wave of colonialism".

But remember that these interventions aren't being sold as colonialism. They are the bold strokes of the new alliance for [food security](http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/food-security) and nutrition. This alliance – between business and government – was launched when the US led the G8 last year. To restate: this is an alliance to end food insecurity tendered by the US, a country where one in six people – 50 million citizens – is food insecure.

Firms like Monsanto and Cargill have pledged $3bn and the UK has pledged £395m, with the justification that – Cameron again – we must "invest in countries before they are broken, we won't have to end up spending money on the problems, whether they be mass migration or threats to our national security". This is, incidentally, the [justification for allowing development funding to bleed into military funding](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/david-cameron-sparks-fury-after-he-hints-that-overseas-aid-budget-could-be-switched-to-mod-8599893.html), as Cameron is keen to do.

This is how [international nutritionism](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/28/magazine/28nutritionism.t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0) [works](http://cup.columbia.edu/book/978-0-231-15656-1/nutritionism). The problems of poverty, colonialism, democracy and reparations for imperialism are transformed into problems of corporations fortifying their food, and governments fortifying their development. This is how Cameron is able to jump from food security to national security without blushing.

This is why groups like La Via Campesina have [no truck with answers to the problem of malnutrition that ignore the politics of the poor](http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/our-conferences-mainmenu-28/6-jakarta-2013/1424-announcement-of-the-outcomes-of-the-6th-international-conference). They understand that the politics of malnutrition are too important to be dissolved in a Diet Coke Plus solution.

• *Raj Patel will speak at the* [*World Development Movement's activist conference*](http://www.wdm.org.uk/not-the-g8)*, "Not the G8", in Leeds on Saturday 15 June*

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Africa, let us help – just like in 1884

From the Conference of Berlin to today's G8, 'helping' Africans looks suspiciously like grabbing their resources

* + [**George Monbiot**](http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/georgemonbiot)

[The Guardian](http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian), Monday 10 June 2013 20.30 BST

One of the stated purposes of the [Conference of Berlin](http://geography.about.com/cs/politicalgeog/a/berlinconferenc.htm) in 1884 was to save Africans from the slave trade. To discharge this grave responsibility, Europe's powers discovered, to their undoubted distress, that they would have to extend their control and ownership of large parts of Africa.

In doing so, they accidentally encountered the vast riches of that continent, which had not in any way figured in their calculations, and found themselves in astonished possession of land, gold, diamonds and ivory. They also discovered that they were able to enlist the labour of a large number of Africans, who, for humanitarian reasons, were best treated as slaves.

One of the stated purposes of the G8 conference, hosted by David Cameron next week, is to [save the people of Africa from starvation](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/jun/09/g8-market-hunger). To discharge this grave responsibility, the global powers have discovered, to their undoubted distress, that their corporations must extend their control and ownership of large parts of Africa. As a result, they will find themselves in astonished possession of Africa's land, seed and markets.

David Cameron's purpose at the G8, as he put it last month, is to advance "the good of people around the world". Or, as Rudyard [Kipling expressed it](http://poetry.rapgenius.com/Rudyard-kipling-the-white-mans-burden-lyrics#note-1275804) during the previous scramble for Africa: *"To seek another's profit, / And work another's gain ... / Fill full the mouth of Famine / And bid the sickness cease"*. Who could doubt that the best means of doing this is to cajole African countries into a new set of agreements that allow foreign companies to grab their land, patent their seeds and monopolise their food markets?

The [New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition](http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2013/jun/07/g8-new-alliance-flawed-project), which bears only a passing relationship to the agreements arising from the Conference of Berlin, will, according to the US agency promoting it, "[lift 50 million people out of poverty](http://allafrica.com/stories/201306090100.html) over the next 10 years through inclusive and sustained agricultural growth". This "inclusive and sustained agricultural growth" will no longer be in the hands of the people who are meant to be lifted out of poverty. How you can have one without the other is a mystery that has yet to be decoded. But I'm sure the alliance's corporate partners – Monsanto, Cargill, Dupont, Syngenta, Nestlé, Unilever, Itochu, Yara International and others – could produce some interesting explanations.

The alliance offers African countries public and private money (the UK has pledged £395m of foreign aid) if they strike agreements with G8 countries and the private sector (in many cases multinational companies). [Six countries have signed up so far](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-alliance).

That African farming needs investment and support is indisputable. But does it need land grabbing? Yes, according to the deals these countries have signed. Mozambique, where local farmers have already been evicted from large tracts of land, is now obliged to write new laws promoting what its agreement calls "partnerships" of this kind. Ivory Coast must "facilitate access to land for smallholder farmers and private enterprises" – in practice evicting smallholder farmers for the benefit of private enterprises. Already French, Algerian, Swiss and Singaporean companies have lined up deals across 600,000 hectares or more of this country's prime arable land. These deals, according to the development group Grain, "[will displace tens of thousands of peasant rice farmers](http://www.grain.org/article/entries/4663-the-g8-and-land-grabs-in-africa) and destroy the livelihoods of thousands of small traders". Ethiopia, where land grabbing has been accompanied by appalling human rights abuses, must assist "agriculture investors (domestic and foreign; small, medium and larger enterprises) to ... secure access to land".

And how about seed grabbing? Yes, that too is essential to the wellbeing of Africa's people. Mozambique is now obliged to "systematically cease distribution of free and unimproved seeds", while drawing up new laws granting intellectual property rights in seeds that will "promote private sector investment". Similar regulations must also be approved in Ghana, Tanzania and Ivory Coast.

The countries that have joined the New Alliance will have to remove any market barriers that favour their own farmers. Where farmers comprise between 50% and 90% of the population, and where their livelihoods are dependent on the non-cash economy, these policies – which make perfect sense in the air-conditioned lecture rooms of the Chicago Business School – can be lethal.

Strangely missing from New Alliance agreements is any commitment on the part of G8 nations to change their own domestic policies. These could have included farm subsidies in Europe and the US, which undermine the markets for African produce; or biofuel quotas, which promote world hunger by turning food into fuel. Any constraints on the behaviour of corporate investors in Africa (such as the Committee on World Food Security's guidelines on land tenure) remain voluntary, while the constraints on host nations become compulsory. As in 1884, powerful nations make the rules and weak ones ones abide by them: for their own good, of course.

The west, as usual, is able to find leaders in Africa who have more in common with the global elite than with their own people. In some of the countries that have joined the New Alliance, there were wide-ranging consultations on land and farming, whose results have been now ignored in the agreements with the G8. The deals between African governments and private companies were facilitated by the [World Economic Forum](http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2013/jan/26/davos-ubs-chairman-warning-complacency), and took place behind closed doors.

But that's what you have to do when you're dealing with "[*new-caught, sullen peoples, / Half devil and half child*](http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/kipling/white_mans_burden.html)", who perversely try to hang on to their own land, their own seeds and their own markets. Even though David Cameron, Barack Obama and the other G8 leaders know it isn't good for them.

New alliance as imperialism in another guise? Monbiot should know better

George Monbiot's portrayal of the G8 initiative as a new form of African colonialism is ill-informed and ignores the political reality

Posted by

Molly Kinder and Nachilala Nkombo

Wednesday 12 June 2013 12.17 BST

On Saturday, at the [nutrition for growth summit](http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2013/jun/08/london-hunger-summit-child-malnutrition), we listened to President Joyce Banda of Malawi discuss her commitment to addressing malnutrition in her country. After hearing Banda's plan to leverage investment from the new alliance for [food security](http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/food-security) and nutrition to transform agriculture and create jobs, we are quite surprised to hear George Monbiot's claim that this initiative is another colonial scramble for [Africa](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/africa).

First, the participation, governance and design of the new alliance contradict [Monbiot's depiction of imperialism by global powers](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/jun/10/african-hunger-help-g8-grab). The alignment of private investment with African-owned agriculture plans is an [explicit aim of the initiative](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/18/fact-sheet-g-8-action-food-security-and-nutrition) and is delineated in each country's co-operation framework. African countries elect to join – they are not coerced – and the heads of state of the three founding countries were actively engaged in shaping the initiative. The leadership council of the new alliance, its governing body, is co-chaired by Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the African Union chairperson, and includes three prominent African farmers' organisations.

The new alliance is also supported by international organisations such as the African Development Bank, the World Food Programme, the International Fund for Agriculture and Development, and the Food and Agriculture Organisation. While the new alliance can and should do more to listen to the voices of African farmers, sensational claims of imperialism are disrespectful and disempowering to this core of African leaders, who champion the interests of their continent unwaveringly.

Second, [ONE's analysis](http://www.one.org/us/2012/12/10/debunking-myths-five-things-you-probably-didnt-know-about-the-new-alliance-and-food-security/) refutes the notion that the new alliance is dominated by multinational companies guilty of exploiting farmers. African companies, many of which are small- or medium-sized enterprises, comprise a large percentage of total new alliance investments. At the nutrition for growth event, DfID announced that the [53 African companies comprised the majority of more than 70 investments](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-alliance) in the three newest countries to join the new alliance.

Moreover, ONE's in-depth analysis of the companies' letters of intent found that new alliance investments treat smallholder farmers not as buyers of multinational companies' products, but rather as [entrepreneurs selling their own agricultural products](http://www.one.org/us/policy/new-alliance-for-food-security-and-nutrition-part-2/). The bulk of the investments entail companies sourcing more crops from smallholder farmers. For instance, many food processing companies include goals to double the amount of product they source from smallholders, while at the same time providing training and better inputs, such as hybrid seeds or mechanisation, to improve output. Such investments are crucial for the millions of African smallholder farmers aiming to escape poverty and move from subsistence to scale.

Third, Monbiot's analysis of the policy reforms central to the new alliance is striking for what it leaves out. A closer look at Mozambique's co-operation framework reveals a different story from the narrow, land-grabbing narrative weaved by Monbiot. Mozambique's policy reform states that, as part of the new alliance, "Mozambique is securing rural land tenure and facilitating access to land for smallholder farmers, women, youth and private enterprise." Weak land tenure systems and land policy rights for women and smallholder farmers are a major challenge across Africa, which policy reforms like Mozambique's seek to address.

Moreover, restrictive seed policy environments are detrimental to farmers' access to improved seed varieties, limiting their productive potential. Seed policy reforms pursued by new alliance countries are designed to make the local seed market flourish and enable smallholder farmers to access the same types of improved seeds that raise yields and income levels, which more productive farmers take for granted elsewhere in the world.

Banda, who was recently [heralded by FAO chief José Graziano da Silva for her efforts to combat hunger](http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2013/mar/08/un-praise-malawi-joyce-banda-hunger), cleared the air when she closed by saying: "I look at the new alliance as a strategy to accelerate investment in agriculture. I had the opportunity to listen to some of the experiences of countries that are already in the new alliance like Ethiopia, Ghana, and Tanzania, and it was very clear that they benefited from their participation including increased volumes of investment in agriculture from foreign and local investors, creation of jobs, boosting of markets domestically and internationally. I have stated that my government will commit a bigger part of the budget to fight hunger, malnutrition and poverty."

This position is consistent with the vision expressed by Banda to ONE during our meeting in February 2013. Instead of perpetuating ill-informed stereotypes, we should be spending much more time listening to bold, reform-minded leaders like Banda as well as African companies and farmers – and taking concerted steps to support them with the investments, capacity, and policy reforms for which they are asking.

G8's new alliance for food security and nutrition is a flawed project

The UK government claims to be commited to ending hunger yet supports a scheme that, billed as good for Africa, is anything but

Posted by

Kirtana Chandrasekaran and Nnimmo Bassey

Friday 7 June 2013 18.42 BST

This weekend, the UK government will host a "nutrition for growth" summit in London. The meeting is expected to expand the G8's [new alliance for food security and nutrition](http://www.state.gov/s/globalfoodsecurity/190282.htm), a special initiative launched in 2012 to mobilise private capital for investment in African agriculture.

We all agree that African agriculture is in need of support and investment. So it's good news, right?

Sadly, no. The new alliance prioritises unprecedented access for multinational companies to resources in Africa. To access cash under the initiative, African governments have to make far-reaching changes to their land, seed and farming policies.

For a disturbing read, take a look at the new alliance's [co-operation frameworks](http://feedthefuture.gov/article/unga2012) with countries. Mozambique, for example, is committed to "systematically ceasing to distribute free and unimproved [non-commercial] seeds to farmers except in emergencies". The new alliance will lock poor farmers into buying increasingly expensive seeds – including genetically modified seeds – allow corporate monopolies in seed selling, and escalate the loss of precious genetic diversity in seeds – [absolutely key](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/biodiversity_paia/PAR-FAO-book_lr.pdf) in the fight against hunger. It will also open the door to genetically modified (GM) crops in Africa by stopping farmers' access to traditional local varieties and forcing them to buy private seeds.

Already, under the guise of helping to fight poor nutrition in Africa, genetically engineered bananas and cassava are being tested – despite [concern about their impacts](http://tyglobalist.org/in-the-magazine/features/genetically-modified-cassava-new-technologies-have-complicated-the-challenge-of-feeding-africa/), and the existence of better [conventional](http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=breeding-cassava) varieties.

Several countries have been asked to speed up the takeover of land by foreign investors. [Ethiopia](http://feedthefuture.gov/sites/default/files/resource/files/Ethiopia_web.pdf), for instance, will "Refine land law, if necessary, to encourage long-term land leasing" (pdf), while [companies are already asking](http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/21586) for up to 500,000 hectares (12.35m acres) of land in Ivory Coast under this scheme.

[Countless studies](http://www.future-agricultures.org/events/global-land-grabbing), including [one by the UN special rapporteur on the right to food](http://www.srfood.org/images/stories/pdf/medias/20110112_op-ed-land-grabbing_en.pdf) (pdf), have shown that large-scale land acquisitions and leases destroy the livelihoods and [food security](http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/food-security) of thousands of communities, and that [access to land](http://www.srfood.org/images/stories/pdf/officialreports/20101021_access-to-land-report_en.pdf) (pdf) is essential for the right to food. This lends more than a touch of irony to the commitment by David Cameron, the UK prime minister, to address land grabbing in this G8 through the [much-criticised](http://www.fian.org/news/article/detail/fian-calls-upon-g8-to-implement-tenure-guidelines/) land transparency initiative.

Already, multinational GM seed, fertiliser and grain companies such as Yara International, Monsanto and Cargill have signed up to benefit from the new alliance, and six African countries – Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique and Tanzania – have signed co-operation agreements. Most of these have barely been subject to democratic scrutiny, and undermine African-led [democratic initiatives](http://www.foodfirst.org/en/Challenge+to+Green+Revolution+for+Africa) to tackle hunger such as the [Maputo declaration](http://www.nepad.org/nepad/knowledge/doc/1787/maputo-declaration) (pdf) to raise public spending on agriculture and regional agriculture policies in west Africa.

No wonder the runup to this weekend's summit has been greeted by an outcry. Networks of smallholder farmers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples and environmentalists from across Africa have called the scheme "[a new wave of colonialism](http://www.acbio.org.za/activist/index.php?m=u&f=dsp&petitionID=3)" designed to secure profits and royalty flows out of Africa. Global civil society [agrees](https://docs.google.com/document/d/11eWFYXv9oo5mlG_ozmaClvmtL_X_Xra42I871wT0fPI/edit?usp=sharing).

It's not as if there is a dearth of opportunities for G8 countries to reduce hunger. They could scrap targets for crop-based biofuels, which are linked to hunger by a growing [list of bodies](http://www.oecd.org/trade/agricultural-trade/48152638.pdf) including the World Bank. They could follow the advice of the [UK parliament](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/international-development-committee/news/substantive-global-food-security-report-publication/) to address overconsumption of meat and support services to smallholders. They could regulate investors to stop land grabbing. And they could fund the legitimate and democratic global governance space on hunger – the [committee on world food security](http://www.fao.org/cfs/en/) – instead of competing with it.

But the new alliance marches on under the banner of "investment".

So there is a bigger question here – is all investment equal? No. The type of investment, where it comes from, and in which parts of the sector it happens, will determine whether we solve hunger or not. By focusing on corporate investment, Cameron is missing the point. Enabling smallholders to produce food for themselves and local populations is key.

The majority of the African population continues to rely on agriculture as its main source of income and livelihoods, and smallholder food production is also key to food security. About [70% of the world](http://www.etcgroup.org/sites/www.etcgroup.org/files/ETC_Who_Will_Feed_Us.pdf), mostly rural populations, is fed by smallholders as opposed to corporate farming, which tends to focus on exports and rich markets. Pumping huge sums into corporate farming may also flop, judging by the [failure rate](http://www.future-agricultures.org/e-debate/big-farm-small-farm/358-are-large-scale-commercial-farms-the-answer-to-africas-agricultural-prayers-#.UbD60lOHdeI) of such ventures in Africa.

Most importantly, smallholders are also the biggest investors in agriculture. According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), in low- and middle-income countries [farmers invest about $170bn a year](http://www.fao.org/news/story/jp/item/165816/icode/) – three times as much as all other sources of investment combined. This is where we need to focus: on policies that encourage farmers to invest more themselves.

The new alliance is a flawed project. Continuing to pursue it will cast a shadow on Cameron's commitment to ending hunger.

• *Kirtana Chandrasekaran is a campaigner with Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Nnimmo Bassey is an executive committee member of Friends of the Earth International*

News story

**World leaders sign global agreement to help beat hunger and malnutrition**

Organisations:

[Department for International Development](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-international-development)+ 1 other

Published:

8 June 2013

Policy:

[Reducing hunger and malnutrition in developing countries](https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/reducing-hunger-and-malnutrition-in-developing-countries)

Topical event:

[UK Presidency of G8 2013](https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/g8-2013)

Ministers:

[The Rt Hon David Cameron MP](https://www.gov.uk/government/people/david-cameron) and [The Rt Hon Justine Greening MP](https://www.gov.uk/government/people/justine-greening)

Governments, businesses and charities make a historic pledge to end undernutrition in our lifetime at today's Nutrition for Growth event

Development Secretary Justine Greening announced a major boost to Britain's work in reducing hunger and malnutrition around the world. Picture: Benet Coulber/DFID

World leaders have today signed a global agreement that will prevent millions of infant deaths, and boost the life chances of millions more, by equipping the developing world with the means to beat malnutrition.

Prime Minister [David Cameron](https://www.gov.uk/government/people/david-cameron), Brazilian Vice President [Michel Temer](http://www.brasil.gov.br/sobre/brazil/president-of-the-republic/biography-of-the-vice-president) and the Children’s Investment Fund Foundation president [Jamie Cooper-Hohn](http://ciff.org/team/staff/office-ceo/) led a [high level summit in London](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-host-high-level-meeting-on-global-nutrition-and-growth) of developing and developed nations, businesses, scientific and civil society groups, committing them to supporting a historic reduction in “undernutrition”.

Undernutrition is a chronic lack of nutrients that can result in death, stunted physical development and in a lower resistance to illnesses in later life. It is the biggest underlying cause of death in under-five-year-olds in the world and is responsible for 8,000 child deaths each day. It stunts the growth of children, reducing their potential, undermining their adult earnings by up to 10%, and in some countries reducing the size of the economy by 11% as a result.

The participants - who signed a Global Nutrition for Growth Compact - committed their countries and organisations by 2020 to:

* improving the nutrition of 500 million pregnant women and young children
* reducing the number of children under five who are stunted by an additional 20 million
* saving the lives of at least 1.7 million children by preventing stunting, increasing breastfeeding and better treatment of severe and acute malnutrition

**[Global Nutrition for Growth Compact](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/205887/Global-Nutrition-for-Growth-Compact-Final.pdf)**

PDF, 552KB, 4 pages

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Among the participants in today’s central London summit were two presidents and four prime ministers from Africa, Irish Taoiseach [Enda Kenny](http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Taoiseach_and_Government/About_the_Taoiseach/), philanthropist [Bill Gates](http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Who-We-Are/General-Information/Leadership/Management-Committee/Bill-Gates), former UN Secretary General [Kofi Annan](http://www.un.org/sg/formersg/annan.shtml) and Unilever chief executive [Paul Polman](http://www.unilever.co.uk/aboutus/companystructure/executivedirectors/paul-polman.aspx).

Donors have today secured new commitments of up to £2.7 billion ($4.15 billion) to tackle undernutrition up to 2020, £1.9 billion ($2.9 billion) of which is core funding with the remainder secured through matched funding. The UK has today committed an additional £375 million of core funding and £280 million of matched funding from 2013 to 2020.

**[Nutrition for Growth Commitments](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/205880/Nutrition-for-growth-commitments.pdf)**

PDF, 464KB, 37 pages

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Countries which have previously increased nutrition funding, like the US and Canada, today committed themselves to continuing those high levels of funding while others, like the [European Union](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/index_en.htm), the [World Bank](http://www.worldbank.org/) and [Ireland](http://www.gov.ie/), have increased their support substantially.

The funds will focus on:

* making world-class scientific knowledge and evidence available, including through a new Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition, so that farmers can grow nutrition-rich and resilient crops, such as vitamin-enriched sweet potato and corn, to feed their families and local areas
* promoting breastfeeding as a priority for protecting nutrition and saving lives
* supporting the governments of developing countries to formulate high quality national nutrition plans and helping them to mobilise domestic resources for them and
* ensuring businesses in developing countries place good nutrition at the heart of their workforce welfare priorities.

International Development Secretary [Justine Greening](https://www.gov.uk/government/people/justine-greening) said:

Undernutrition is stopping children and countries from reaching their full potential, accounting for the loss of billions of dollars in productivity. A strong and healthy workforce is vital if a country’s economy is to prosper. This means business and science taking a lead in fighting for good nutrition because we understand that better nutrition is the smart way to tackle extreme poverty, child mortality and economic underachievement.

The commitments secured today will help transform the life chances of millions of children and pregnant women by ensuring they get the right nutrition at the right time, securing greater long-term economic growth and prosperity for all.

President and CEO of the Children’s Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF) [Jamie Cooper-Hohn](http://ciff.org/team/staff/office-ceo/) said:

We have a unique window of opportunity now to marshal the global coalescence around the nutrition agenda and to tackle the root cause of child mortality and economic underachievement. With renewed commitment from all of us in recognition of the centrality of nutrition to economic growth and development we will be making one of the most important contributions to the growth and economic development of some of the poorest countries in the world.

Today marks the start of a sustained financial and political commitment to ending undernutrition within a generation. Working together, this unique coalition can take action which history will judge as having contributed to saving the lives of millions of women and children and setting nations on a strong economic path to prosperity.

Undernutrition is an underlying cause in 45% of deaths amongst children under five, while nearly 165 million suffer from stunting which stops children’s bodies from developing properly. The effects of undernutrition have the greatest impact in the first 1,000 days of life from conception to a child’s second birthday. Failure to get the right nutrition at this critical time causes irreversible lifelong damage.

Nutrition for Growth builds on the process started at last year’s [Hunger Summit](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hunger-event-lasting-legacy-for-children-around-the-world) held by the UK and Brazilian Governments in London, which highlighted the devastating consequences of undernutrition on children.

The [World Health Assembly](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/events/governance/wha/en/) recently agreed a new global target of a 40% reduction in the number of stunted children by 2025. The commitments secured today will transform progress towards this goal. Commitments made today will be monitored and tracked annually, and progress made in addressing undernutrition will be measured at a global event in Brazil at the Rio 2016 Olympics.