

Conference report

The 2013 G8 Summit: questioning the New Alliance

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Earlier commitments by the G8 to support agriculture in the wake of the 2007–08 food price crises have been partly forgotten. However, last year's G8 Summit saw the launch of the 'New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition', and a year on, 'Nutrition for Growth' attracted donor focus at a meeting leading up to this year's summit. Yet doubts exist about whether the New Alliance, under its current design, risks harming rather than helping Africa's smallholder farmers.

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The 2013 G8 Summit took place in June on the shores of Loch Erne in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland. The 'Group of 8', the club of some of the world's leading industrial powers, were hosted by the UK for the first time since 2005, and David Cameron's priorities for the Summit focused on his '3Ts' agenda: tax, trade, and transparency.

For British civil society, the UK's presidency of the G8 this year was an opportunity to unite behind a new campaign, 'Enough Food for Everyone IF'. The campaign demanded action to end the scandal that sees one in eight people go to bed hungry every night and focused on the drivers of hunger, calling for action on aid, on land, on tax, and on transparency. It also called for greater action from the G8 on public investment in agriculture. While tackling tax dodging and the unfolding Syria crisis dominated the headlines, the G8's previous promises on food security were mostly forgotten.

Approximately 870 million people around the world do not get enough food to eat. The bitter irony is that the majority of people suffering from hunger are small-scale food producers. Women are disproportionately represented among the food insecure. The persistent lack of adequate public finance has exacerbated food insecurity and vulnerability to global food price rises, rural poverty, and climate change in the world's poorest countries. International aid to agriculture collapsed from 17 per cent of aid in 1980 to 3.4 per cent in 2006.

In the wake of the 2007–08 food price crises, food security was one of the priorities of the 2009 Italian G8 Summit. In their 'L'Aquila commitments', G8 leaders pledged US\$22 bn towards agricultural development, nutrition, and infrastructure. Just as importantly, this assistance was pledged to support existing national agriculture strategies and plans – a real and important endorsement that country ownership must be at the heart of the agriculture development agenda. Progress in meeting these promises has been slow; the G8's 'Accountability Report' this year showed that only \$16.4 bn has been disbursed – leaving a 25 per cent shortfall.

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Last year's G8, hosted by the US, gave birth to the 'New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition', an initiative to increase private sector investment in agriculture and 'raise 50 million people out of poverty by 2022'. It brought together an array of commitments from various groups: from donors to continue to provide assistance to the agriculture sector, from governments to reform domestic policies, and from the private sector to invest in a handful of African countries (originally 45 companies committed to over \$3 bn of investments in Africa, mainly focused on six African countries: Ethiopia, Tanzania, Mozambique, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso). From its launch, this initiative has been the subject of serious criticism, including from the farmers' groups that the initiative supposedly aims to help.

Although this year's G8 Summit paid little attention to food security, agriculture did receive airtime at an international event on hunger a week ahead of the summit. The morning session, entitled 'Nutrition for Growth', saw donors pledge \$4.15 bn to tackle under-nutrition up to 2020 – a significant achievement in the context of falling aid levels. It also saw a series of commitments from developing countries to increase domestic resources for scaling up nutrition and establish national stunting-reduction targets. However, the IF campaign's calls to increase public investment in agriculture to meet the 51 per cent gap in country agriculture plans was ignored – a sour note to end the breakthrough on nutrition.

During the afternoon session, the New Alliance met to review progress towards its objectives. Oxfam had expressed its concerns about the New Alliance ahead of the event, pointing to the fact that the domestic policy reforms expected of developing country partners have the potential to tip the balance of national policies in favour of big business over small-scale family farmers. While some reforms, such as incorporating nutrition more centrally into the agriculture investment agenda, are positive, others, such as changes in land policy and seed sector liberalization, are more controversial and threaten to put at risk farmers' rights and access to land, seed, and water. Oxfam also cited a lack of systematic country-level civil society participation in the negotiation of the New Alliance's Cooperation Framework Agreements, which means that questions of risk to farmers are not being adequately addressed nor are their needs – for better infrastructure, extension services, and credit among other things – being met.

With these concerns in mind and so many unanswered questions being raised not just by Oxfam and the IF campaign, but by civil society organizations across the US, Europe, and, most importantly, Africa, the demand to the New Alliance was to halt further expansion, review existing country commitments and undertake reforms to address these shortcomings. Despite these calls, three new countries – Nigeria, Benin, and Malawi – announced their commitment to joining the initiative. But time and time again, participants in the meeting repeated the message that the New Alliance needs to do more to ensure small-scale farmers, especially women, properly participate in, and benefit from, the New Alliance.

Of course, the \$4.1 bn in commitments to tackle nutrition could herald a real breakthrough in the fight against hunger – if pledges are followed by cold, hard cash. However, it is in largely ignoring agriculture and failing to reform the New Alliance that this year's G8 fell short.

For the latest information about Oxfam's recommendations to the New Alliance, please see www.oxfam.org/en/policy/new-alliance-new-direction-needed.