

Response to the World Development Movement's campaign to withdraw UK support from New Alliance

The UK Government believes that economic development is essential to raise incomes and tackle food insecurity in Africa. In the least developed countries, up to half the population, including millions of smallholder farmers, are net food buyers; raising agricultural productivity is essential to reduce poverty and ensure all people have access to affordable food. Over the last three years the UK has contributed over £3 billion to agriculture and food security programmes that benefit poor farmers. We believe public investment in African agriculture remains important, and the UK Government will continue to invest in rural infrastructure, agricultural research, social protection, and programmes that help smallholder farmers adapt to climate change. However, the kind of transformative change required to lift millions out of poverty will also depend on significant private sector investment by small and large farms, and agribusinesses. The New Alliance aims to facilitate and leverage this kind of investment.

The New Alliance is a joint initiative involving African governments, local and global companies, and donors. It aims to lift 50 million people out of poverty by 2022 through accelerating agricultural sector growth in Africa. Although it started out as a G8 initiative in 2012, the New Alliance is now supported by a wide range of African and global stakeholders with an independent Leadership Council co-chaired in 2014 by the US, the African Union Commission and the World Economic Forum.

African government participation in the New Alliance is on a voluntary, self-selecting basis. Policy reforms to improve agriculture are developed by governments, including through negotiation with local and global companies, farmer organisations, donors and civil society. In 2014, the UK will support efforts to establish an annual review of all Cooperation Frameworks in each partner country involving all stakeholders including civil society.

Agriculture has always been a predominantly private sector activity and for DFID the private sector ranges from a smallholder farmer selling produce at a local market, to national or global agribusinesses. The majority of investment commitments made by companies in Benin, Malawi and Nigeria under the New Alliance in 2013, have come from African companies, including two smallholder farmer organisations. The UK Government does not provide funding to companies in support of their New Alliance commitments. Global food and agribusiness companies can make a valuable contribution too, including by sourcing products from

small-scale farms and by providing training and access to improved technology, including seeds. We believe developing country governments and farmers should have access to appropriate information to make informed decisions about improved seed varieties and the extent to which they can help address food security concerns.

Agricultural investment can benefit everyone provided it is socially and environmentally responsible, including where it involves commercial land acquisitions. All parties investing under the New Alliance commit to support implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of land, fisheries and forests, international guidelines to make land investments transparent and accountable. More widely, DFID has improved land and property rights for 2.5 million men and women across Rwanda, India, Nepal and Mozambique since 2010 and by 2015, DFID has committed to improve access to land and property rights for more than 6 million people.

The New Alliance is only in its second year and there is still much to do to ensure it has a lasting impact on poverty reduction, and food and nutrition security across Africa. However, I believe it can make an important contribution to poverty reduction and food security in Africa.

Justine Greening