

London Hunger Conference: Feeding the World or Feeding the Corporations?

Event Excludes Small Scale Farmers with Tickets at £695

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Small-scale farmers in Mozambique – who collectively grow most of Africa’s food. Photo: União Nacional de Camponeses.

Tickets to today’s Feeding the World conference in London cost £695 – a sure way to exclude the small and family farmers that produce 70% of the world’s food. Graciela Romero denounces the global corporate takeover of land, food and farming.

This gathering is not for those not with legitimacy, but for those with the political and economic power to shape the global food system.

Today sees *The Economist* boost multi-million pound business as the notorious Monsanto’s chief executive sits alongside UN representatives at the magazine’s [Feeding the World 2014 conference](#) in London.

The title for this year’s annual event poses the question whether the current world hunger crisis – over 800 million hungry people – will become a catastrophe by 2050, when the global population is expected to reach 9.6 billion.

Solutions only from the uber-wealthy

Yet, despite so many people facing a chronic lack of food, the conference once again devotes much of its space to claimed solutions from the super-rich on how to address the crisis.

Few, if any among the hundreds of millions of the world’s small-scale farmers are expected to have their say – small wonder, when almost £700 is needed for the minimal admission fee.

With charities and others charged even higher sums, the inevitable conclusion is that this gathering is not for those not with legitimacy, but for those with the political and economic power to shape the global food system.

And, of course, the space for large aid agencies to roam and continue shaking the hand that feeds them.

Powerful but illegitimate

The power of getting your message across through exclusive conferences, afforded by

international bodies and high profile media channels, cannot remain underestimated, or unchallenged by voices that expose their illegitimacy and abuse of power.

The cosy public-private dinners and forums have reached every sphere. Expensive meals and meetings, featuring discussions on the hungry poor, sustainable agriculture and the environment, are endemic.

Not only do such comfortable talks serve the purpose of influencing policy makers, but they also shape the messages that ordinary people receive through the media.

Indeed, they could easily be seen as part of corporations' PR, advertising and lobbying strategies.

Small farmers are feeding the world – not corporations

High-level conferences explicitly avoid tackling the real power unbalances in the food system. Millions of small-scale farmers produce 70% of the world's food.

Yet they remain excluded and forgotten from exchanges which affect their livelihoods or concern how to end world hunger.

How many high-level audience conferences are organised to promote, let alone present, the vast evidence from scientists and millions of farmers on the positive long-term impact of techniques such as agroecology that confront the global food and environmental crisis?

There are underlying power relations within the global food system which constantly exacerbate the world food crisis. The Feeding the World conference epitomes how power is controlled and owned by dominant players.

A new wave of corporate colonialism

Can Monsanto or Nestlé, corporations which make huge profits, be trusted to tackle the planet's food security crisis? Why are the voices of millions of small-scale food producers, many of them women, not represented at such conferences?

Another event on the same issue took place last summer, as part of David Cameron's hunger summit, held at the London headquarters of the food giant Unilever.

Big business chiefs shared the table with G8 leaders of the world's leading economies to decide how to divide African markets, land and seeds among their countries and corporations like Monsanto.

Cameron ignored the call from African civil society to stop the new wave of colonialism with his [£395 million of UK aid](#) money give-away to support large companies operating in the continent.

Writing global food policy – for their own profit

Last November, the UN Conference on Trade and Development was attended by representatives from the [World Business Council for Sustainable Development](#), with 200 of the largest corporations as members, including Monsanto.

They had the space and time to dictate the tone of the discussion about the need for private investment in developing countries, dismissing questions about environmental degradation and the displacement of entire communities.

Or take the G8's launch of the [New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition](#) in May 2012. A private sector investment initiative, its objective is to open up African agriculture to multinational agribusiness companies by means of national 'cooperation frameworks' between African governments, donors and investors – with no reference to the needs or wishes of African farmers.

They call it 'sustainable agriculture' – but it's the opposite

There is no space at such events to question, or to remember that expensive agrochemical packages, sold to Indian farmers, drove many thousands to unsustainable debts and suicide with the very same chemicals.

Or that Nestlé – [The Baby Killer](#) – as exposed by [War on Want](#), continues to cause illness and death by promoting bottle feeding and undermining breast feeding in developing countries with less accessible clean water.

The technical fixes pushed by Monsanto, through initiatives such as [Global Harvest](#) and the [African Agricultural Technology Foundation](#), supported by the British and US governments, are sold and pushed as sustainable agriculture practices to harness productivity, trade and development.

Though the two initiatives are championed for small-scale farmers in Africa, president Barack Obama does not shy away from highlighting the real benefits of the Global Harvest Initiative, boosting US trade and its farmers.

Support food sovereignty for the poor, not profit for the rich

If the people behind debates on the food crisis really want to address the root causes of the problem, they should expose [private-led initiatives promoting corporate sales and resource control](#).

It is time to advocate for and support millions of producers working towards positive alternatives, such as food sovereignty and agroecology, that safeguard people's livelihoods and the environment.

Public bodies and government officials should act as watchdogs for public interest, not feed profitable relationships with corporations.

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