



**NOURISH CONFERENCE 2014**

# Our Common Wealth of Food

India, Malawi, Trinidad and Tobago and Scotland



# Our Common Wealth of Food

Can we use a Common Wealth approach to food? There is enough food for everyone, but people go hungry in Scotland as well as in poorer countries.

With increasing inequality, food poverty and diet-related diseases are escalating. Meanwhile, family farmers across the world are being squeezed off the land, and the food system is harming biodiversity and driving climate change, which in turn makes farming dangerously unpredictable.

This year at the Nourish Scotland conference, we'll be sharing experiences and ideas with farmers and policymakers from India, Malawi and Trinidad and Tobago as well as from Scotland.

In addition to stark contrasts between these four very different countries, what parallels might we find? What impact does the way we do food in Scotland have on people in other parts of the world? What can we learn from Indian farmers' and shopkeepers' resistance to supermarket expansion? Are our aid policies fuelling landgrabbing in Malawi? Why does Trinidad and Tobago rely so heavily on imported food?

We hope the food profiles of the four countries in the following pages will provoke some questions and whet your appetite for discussion.

## INDIA

India's rapid economic growth has not been accompanied by a redistribution of wealth. Seventeen per cent of India's almost 1.3 billion people are undernourished, and in children under five the figure rises to 44 per cent.

Around two thirds of India's population depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, most of them farming very small areas of land. Many farmers struggle to make a living, and over a quarter of a million Indian farmers have committed suicide since 1995.

Aside from farming, millions of people in India also rely on forests or on fishing.

India's 'green revolution', beginning in the 1960s, increased the use of pesticides, fertilisers, and hybrid seeds in some parts of the country. While overall production increased, so did inequality. Many small farmers continue suffer from debt incurred through buying these inputs, and from decreased soil quality. Efforts to promote agricultural chemicals and seeds controlled by companies like Monsanto continue, but face significant opposition.

### POLICY BATTLEGROUND

Government policy in India is a complex battleground. Major pieces of progressive legislation have been passed to improve food security and uphold the rights of food producers, but implementation is often hampered by corruption and by the competing interests of big business.

India's stand-off with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) over food and agriculture has hit global headlines in recent months. In a move applauded by critics of the WTO's 'free market' agenda, the Indian government has refused to ratify a global trade





agreement that sets limits on farm subsidies. The government claims the agreement would threaten its commitment under India's new National Food Security Act to provide subsidised food to around two thirds of the population.

The new law, introduced in 2013, legally binds the government to provide people with food, building on decades of previous public feeding programmes. It entitles over 800 million people to buy 5kg of subsidised food grains per month, and pregnant women, lactating mothers and some children to access daily free meals. It remains to be seen how successful the new law will be in reducing hunger.

### MILK MARKETS

International trade negotiations also have implications for other aspects of the food system. For India's small-scale farmers, pressure to open the country's markets to multinational companies is a major concern.

Milk plays an important role in people's diets, and the Indian dairy sector involves 90 million people, 75 million of whom are women. Small-scale and domestic milk production accounts for 85 per cent of the national market. Government efforts to link village milk producers to urban markets have paid off, helping many villagers to earn an income.

But representatives of the European dairy trade are pushing for access to the Indian market in negotiations on a trade agreement between India and the EU. Heavily subsidised European milk products could force down the prices Indian farmers get for

their milk, and there is strong opposition to the trade deal from farmers, cooperatives and trade unions in India.

Food retail is another highly contested area. Plans by the previous government to allow multinational supermarket chains to operate in India sparked protests by small shopkeepers and farmers, who fear that supermarkets would put them out of business. The new government elected this year has put the proposals on ice, despite its strong tendency to favour big business and foreign investment.

### LAND RIGHTS

Land rights are a key issue in a country where so many people depend on the land for their livelihoods. India's economic boom has its losers as well as its winners, and huge industrial projects have displaced many communities from their land, especially tribal peoples. Mass movements of landless rural and tribal people have emerged, agitating for land rights.

In response, the previous government passed a law in 2013 setting out the levels of consent that companies must gain from local people before acquiring land, and the compensation they must provide. India's new government has moved quickly to dilute the law, drawing condemnation from activists and the promise of further protests.

Those who have land to farm also have to make do with less – the average farm size in India roughly halved between 1971 and 2006. At the same time, Indian companies and the Indian government are behind agricultural landgrabs in Africa, South America and Southeast Asia.

***“PLANS TO ALLOW MULTINATIONAL SUPERMARKET CHAINS TO OPERATE IN INDIA SPARKED PROTESTS BY SMALL SHOPKEEPERS AND FARMERS, WHO FEAR THAT SUPERMARKETS WOULD PUT THEM OUT OF BUSINESS.”***

# MALAWI

MALAWI IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S POOREST COUNTRIES, WITH MORE THAN HALF OF ITS POPULATION LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE, A FIFTH OF PEOPLE UNDERNOURISHED, AND A HEAVY DEPENDENCE ON FOOD AID. MOST MALAWIANS LIVE IN RURAL AREAS AND RELY ON SUBSISTENCE FARMING.



Malawi is also one of the world's most unequal countries in terms of land. The average smallholder farmer cultivates less than half a hectare – often barely enough to feed the family. Meanwhile, half of the country's arable land is divided into estates of between ten and 500 hectares.

## LEGACY OF COLONIALISM

The dominance of big estates is a legacy of British colonialism, which prioritised big plantations of tobacco, tea and sugar for export. Since independence in the mid-1960s, government policies have continued to favour exports – particularly tobacco, which provides 70-80 per cent of Malawi's foreign income. More land has been transferred from local communities to big estates, leaving more people without land, and turning many into poorly paid wage labourers.

From the 1980s, policies imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund reduced subsidies and other support for Malawi's smallholder farmers, increased food prices, and meant less food was produced. Combined with droughts, floods and the HIV/AIDS crisis, this led to periods of severe food shortage and hunger in the 1990s and early 2000s.

## FERTILISER FOR SMALL FARMERS

Since 2005, the Malawi government has spent millions of dollars on subsidising maize seeds and fertilisers for small-scale farmers, which along with good weather has led to several years of strong maize harvests. The government claimed that Malawi had become self-sufficient in

maize, the country's key staple food. But since 2010, big crop losses in some areas, along with soaring food prices following the devaluation of Malawi's currency, have left many people unable to produce or buy enough food.

Malawi's fertiliser subsidies are a mixed blessing. Chemical fertilisers have helped to boost production in the short-term, but they are damaging soil and reducing its fertility in the long-term, especially since the very small amount of land available to most farmers means they are forced to deplete their soil. Chemical fertilisers are also expensive. Malawi does not produce them, so has to import all the fertilisers made available to farmers through its subsidy programme. In 2008, nine per cent of the country's entire budget was being spent on imported fertilisers.

Lack of land reform is probably the biggest limiting factor in efforts to help Malawi's smallholder farmers. Without a more equitable distribution of land, farmers' livelihoods, and the country's food security, are likely to remain precarious. Some farmers are forced to cultivate forest and marginal hilly land, increasing deforestation and soil erosion, further reducing the quality of agricultural land.

But instead of redistributing land to small farmers, the Malawi government is allowing foreign governments and companies – including British companies – to take over large areas of farmland to grow crops for export.

## LAND FOR BIG AGRIBUSINESS

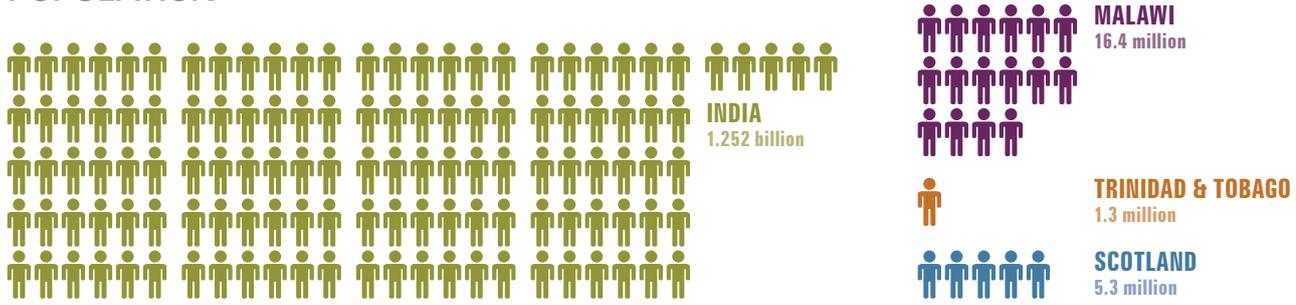
Landgrabbing is already happening in Malawi. But pressure from aid donors seems likely to increase corporate control over Malawi's farmland. In 2013, Malawi joined the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, a scheme in which aid money and investment are being channelled to African countries in return for policy changes that favour big multinational agribusiness. Malawi's commitments under the New Alliance include releasing 200,000 hectares for large scale commercial agriculture by 2015. The country has also committed to reforming its seed laws to allow greater access by biotechnology companies like Monsanto.

The UK is one of the countries financing the New Alliance, channelling £600 million in aid to the scheme overall.

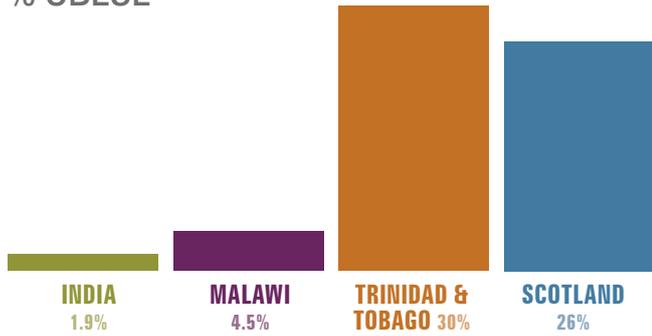
The Malawi government's moves to make it easier for big agribusiness to operate in and profit from the country are not going unopposed. In July 2014, for example, a coalition of farmers and community and church groups launched a campaign to block Monsanto's bid to grow GM cotton in Malawi.

And while political will to move away from imported fertilisers may be lacking, some farmers are taking the initiative themselves. The Soils, Food and Healthy Communities project in northern Malawi, started by a local hospital, works with more than 4,000 farmers using agroecological methods like legume diversification, agroforestry and mulching. Child nutrition, soil fertility and food security in the area have all improved as a result.

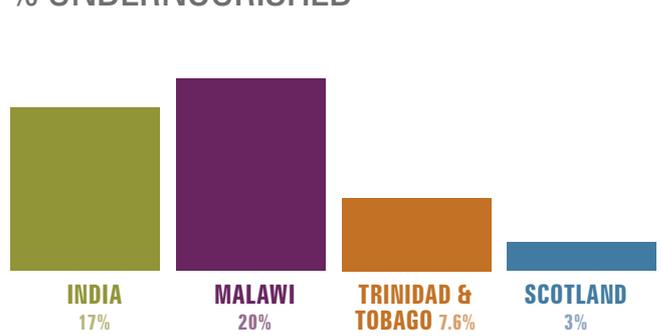
# POPULATION



## % OBESE



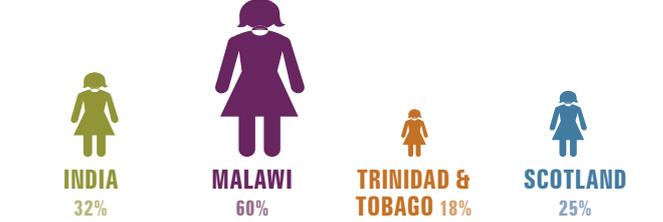
## % UNDERNOURISHED



## HOUSEHOLD INCOME SPENT ON FOOD



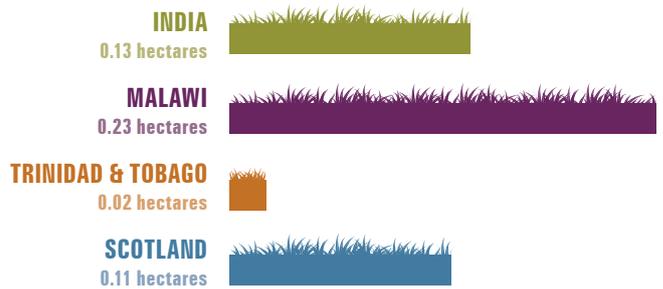
## AGRICULTURAL LABOUR FORCE WHO ARE WOMEN



## ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT PER PERSON



## ARABLE LAND PER PERSON



## ANNUAL MEAT CONSUMPTION PER PERSON



# TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO IS ONE OF THE RICHEST COUNTRIES IN THE CARIBBEAN, THANKS TO ITS RESERVES OF OIL AND GAS. BUT THE TWO-ISLAND NATION HAS A WIDE POVERTY GAP. IT WAS RECENTLY RANKED THE WORLD'S FIFTH FATTEST NATION, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME NEARLY EIGHT PERCENT OF PEOPLE ARE UNDERNOURISHED. RISING GLOBAL FOOD PRICES HAVE HIT POORER SECTIONS OF THE POPULATION HARD, PARTICULARLY SINCE MOST FOOD IS IMPORTED.

Smallholder farmers struggle to secure land tenure, and land remains concentrated in the hands of a wealthy minority. In recent years, the government has made efforts to increase and diversify domestic food production, with some success. Trinidad and Tobago produces much of its own vegetables, fruit, poultry, eggs and pork. However, the closure of the sugar industry in the first decade of the twenty-first century was a major blow to the country's agriculture sector.

## SUGAR COLONY

As in the rest of the Caribbean, colonisation turned the islands of Trinidad and Tobago into sugar-producing colonies. Plantations were worked first by slaves, and following abolition, by indentured labourers brought by the British from the Indian subcontinent. Since the entire focus of the colonial economy on the islands was the production of sugar cane and later cocoa for export, imported food was essential, and a pattern of dependence on imports was set. The plantation system also set a pattern that favours large commercial farms over smallholders.

From the 1970s, the government of Trinidad and Tobago prioritised the oil and gas industries, and agriculture suffered from neglect. But sugar production, which had been nationalised following independence from Britain, continued.

## TRADE RULES

From 1951, the sugar industry in Trinidad and Tobago and other former British colonies was protected through guaranteed access to Commonwealth markets. But these protections are now being phased out through new international trade rules that favour powerful companies and countries. Since the 1980s, the IMF had pushed for Trinidad and Tobago to restructure its state sugar company, Caroni, deeming it 'uncompetitive', and the company was closed in 2003. In contrast, protection remains in place for sugar industries in the USA, the UK and other European countries.

The demise of the sugar industry in Trinidad and Tobago and other parts of the Caribbean is an illustration of the skewed nature of the dominant 'free trade' agenda, which protects multinational companies and farmers in wealthy countries, while forcing less powerful players to compete on much harder terms on a supposedly free market.

Despite the sugar industry's dominance of agricultural land in Trinidad



and Tobago, sugar plantations provided workers with small areas of land on which they could grow food for their families and for sale in local markets. So the closure of the sugar industry in 2003 not only left 9,000 workers, most Indo-Trinidadian, without jobs, but it also deprived many of the land they used for subsistence farming.

## LAND TENURE

Trinidadian campaigners have pointed out that the closure of the state sugar company could have provided an opportunity to redistribute land to small farmers. Instead, much of the land formerly used for sugar has gone to wealthy companies and individuals, to be used for large commercial farms, golf courses and hotel complexes. And a financial aid package for agriculture from the EU has mostly been used to set up big agribusiness companies to grow export crops, rather than to help former sugar workers re-establish themselves as smallholder farmers.

Lack of secure land for small farmers in Trinidad and Tobago has led many to farm on hillsides and forest land, causing soil erosion and forest fires. Chemicals are heavily used in Trinidadian farming, although farmers in Tobago use very few.

As in other countries that rely heavily on imports, the food people eat in Trinidad and Tobago has an environmental and social impact beyond its shores, and its per capita greenhouse gas emissions are high.

# SCOTLAND

SCOTLAND IS A RICH COUNTRY, BUT HAS A WIDE POVERTY GAP THAT IS REFLECTED IN A HUGE AND GROWING INEQUALITY OF DIET BETWEEN RICH AND POOR.

Falling incomes and rising food prices in recent years have meant the poorest people in Scotland have less money to spend on food, and the past two years have seen a sharp increase in the number of people using food banks.

More than a quarter of people are obese, giving Scotland one of the worst obesity rates in Europe. Only one in five adults eats the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables per day, and consumption of fruit and vegetables has fallen as household budgets have been squeezed.

## RURAL EXODUS

Scotland was transformed from a largely rural, agricultural country to a largely urban, industrialised one during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

First in the lowland areas of the country and later in the highlands, tenant farmers whose families had worked the land for generations were evicted as landowners saw greater profit in large-scale, more modern farming methods, and in covering the land with sheep and cattle.

The urban population became largely dependent on cheap, processed foods such as white bread and sugar, while agriculture was increasingly geared towards export – setting a pattern that is very much in evidence in Scotland today.

Distribution of land in Scotland has its roots even further back, to the division of land into large estates controlled by feudal barons in the twelfth century. Land distribution is the most unequal in Europe, with fewer than one thousand people owning half of all land. Many landowners use land for recreational hunting, shooting and fishing, rather than for food production.

The Scottish government has promised to

introduce reforms to bring about a fairer distribution of land. A recent government study recommended limiting the size of landholdings, giving tenant farmers the right to buy the land they farm, and extending existing legislation to help communities to buy land collectively.

## INDUSTRIAL FARMING

The largest area of agricultural land in Scotland is used for rough grazing for sheep and cattle, with other land being used for poultry, grains, vegetables and soft fruit. Crop farming has become increasingly industrialised, and relies heavily on pesticides, fertilisers and fuel, damaging local environments and the global climate. Most farms also rely on agricultural subsidies.

Food retail in Scotland is dominated by supermarkets, which force down the prices farmers receive for their produce.

## IMPORT AND EXPORT

Government policy on agriculture and food production has for many years focused on export and profit. Exports, particularly of whisky, fish and seafood, are growing. Meat, grains, fruit and vegetables are also exported.

Yet while Scotland produces and exports large quantities of food, around 40 per cent of the food people eat is imported. Transporting so much food into the country, often from the other side of the world, significantly increases Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions.

The way in which some of this food is produced also harms people and environments in the countries it comes from, forcing people to work in poor conditions and for low wages, using up precious water supplies, and taking land that local people need to grow food for



themselves and their communities. UK companies are among those involved in grabbing agricultural land in poorer countries.

## LOCAL FOOD MOVEMENT

In response to the many problems related to food in Scotland, a diverse movement has emerged aiming to make food better, healthier, fairer and more sustainable. The number of small farms and food businesses is growing, demand for allotments is high, people are setting up community gardens to grow food together, and networks are being established to increase access to affordable, healthy, local food. However, these efforts currently account for a small proportion of Scotland's overall food consumption.

Government policy, which has long treated health, the environment, farming and food production as separate spheres, has begun to look at food more holistically. The Scottish government's first national food and drink strategy, published in 2009, focused on exports more than anything else, and has been successful in helping these grow. But the government has also committed to extending the provision of free school meals, and improving the quality of food in schools and hospitals. Land reform since 2003 has already allowed 500,000 acres of land to come under community ownership, and a target of one million acres by 2020 has been set.

A new strategy published for consultation this year, entitled 'Becoming a Good Food Nation', sets out aspirations for government policy to focus on health, particularly for children, and to support the production and sale of locally grown food, including through public sector food buying.-



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