

**HILARY BENN MP, Secretary of State for International Development**

Department for International Development,  
1 Palace Street,  
London,  
SW1E 5HE

7th December 2004

Dear Mr Benn,

The UK Food Group held a seminar last week to discuss progress of the DFID Agriculture Policy review, and to consider key points for the Guidelines. This was attended by members of the group and officials from your Natural Resources and Agriculture Policy Division.

The UK Food Group supports the approach, outlined in DFID's Factsheet No 1 in the Agriculture and Poverty Reduction series. Namely that DFID "is committed to supporting agriculture as a means of reducing poverty and achieving the millennium development goals", and that this "requires new approaches to agriculture". We believe this needs especially to address all the goals including those on social issues and the environment.

The seminar heard a powerful presentation by PV Satheesh of the Deccan Development Society, India, and by farmers from Andhra Pradesh. This showed the strong and deep attachment that farmers have to their land and way of life. This we believe is universal. "We learned our agriculture from our parents and want to pass it on to our children", said one. Farmers do not often leave their land unless they are forced to leave it, unless the economics of their farming make it no longer tenable.

DFID's policy paper of December 2003 "Agriculture and poverty reduction: unlocking the potential", outlines DFID's plans for overcoming the factors "limiting the effective contribution of agriculture to poverty reduction". We agree with the paper that for many developing countries "there is no realistic alternative – and no more important challenge – than to make agriculture work". The reality is that family-based agriculture accounts for around 90 per cent of agricultural output.

Some of the discussion at the seminar concerned the economics of small farmer agriculture, industrial agriculture and exiting the land. Before we talk of people exiting the land, we believe there is a need to create an environment which enables them to stay there.

We need to identify more closely the factors that force small farmers off their land - it is too simplistic to speak of creating a platform in which farmers have the choice to leave or stay on their land, when external factors leave them with no choice. These include:

1. Liberalised markets which mean that farmers cannot compete with imported foodstuffs and are driven into bankruptcy.
2. Falling prices of primary commodities, often brought about by the increased supplies which have been encouraged under World Bank/IMF structural adjustment policies and development assistance, supported by Western governments, (increased coffee production in Vietnam e.g.).
3. International rules on Intellectual property rights which can limit the ability of farmers to save and exchange their seed.
4. The imposition of inappropriate Western country-style industrial agricultural technology and the threat to indigenous technology and knowledge.

We feel that the government must commit itself to correcting factors like these. We would also encourage DFID to build on successes. We note for example, that in Malawi, DFID's targeted inputs programme "is revitalising agriculture". If in Malawi, why not in other countries too?

Especially with supportive policies, small farmer agriculture can be highly efficient and produce as much food per area of land as industrial agriculture, provided that external factors, such as listed above, are not working against it. It also enables smallholders to be independent rather than employed by others, and may be more sustainable than industrial agriculture. DFID should be wary of pushing industrial agriculture, in our view, when there are increasing doubts as to its sustainability.

In some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, small farmer agriculture is difficult. But industrial agriculture could be particularly inappropriate for such areas.

DFID needs to support processes that explicitly aim to strengthen the voices of the weak (smallholder farmers, agricultural and food workers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples and other rural and urban poor), especially through social movements, in setting agendas for scientific and technological research as well as in framing policies and regulatory frameworks for food and agriculture.

In order to reverse the current democratic deficit, DFID should:

**Open up agriculture policy processes to more diverse forms of knowledge.** The issue here is not to choose between popular knowledge and scientific expertise, but to recognise the legitimacy of a variety of systems of knowledge, and to give them all a place in the decision- and policy-making process.

**Embrace participatory decision-making approaches.** Methods and procedures exist that allow for the involvement of people and organisations in policy making processes and agenda setting for science and technology R&D (e.g. citizen juries, future search and other methods for deliberative and inclusive processes). This is particularly important for the people normally excluded from planning and decisions.

The use of such deliberative and inclusive processes by DFID is urgently needed to combat social exclusion and develop effective, sustainable and equitable policies and practices for food and agriculture that will combat hunger and poverty in the long-term.

The view that small farms are not commercially viable "ignores the enormous diversity of small-farm situations.....and hence fails to take into account the substantial prospects for small-farm development in many developing countries....Nor does it suggest how a rapid disappearance of small farms could be managed without leading to a much larger number of people becoming trapped in rural poverty and

urban ghettos". (Peter Hazell, "Last Chance for the Small Farm?", IFPRI Forum, October 2004. [www.ifpri.org](http://www.ifpri.org))

Also, as a recent Farm Africa report (FARM-Africa, Harvest Help and Imperial College London) points out, even when conditions in poorer areas are too difficult for agriculture to be a viable driver for pro-poor economic growth, support for smallholder agricultural development is still important because few other growth opportunities exist in many of these areas. Smallholder agriculture also performs important welfare and food security roles in these areas and hence there are considerable social, economic and environmental costs of failure to support it.

We trust that the Guidelines will take account of these views, and the views expressed in the e-consultation and through CSO feedback on the drafts of the 14 working papers. We believe that pro-poor "new approaches to agriculture" will mean that DFID goes beyond neo-liberal approaches and is open and willing to change its policies to fully support sustainable agricultural development.

We also attach key points that were sent to your office after a meeting held between IIED, Farm-Africa and myself with Alex Evans. We hope that they can also make a useful contribution to the draft guidelines. These points are not simply the opinions of a few UK-based NGOs but attempt, albeit briefly, to reflect the deeply-felt concerns of our partners in the Global South and especially those in the Social Movements, representing the mass movements of the poor.

We look forward to seeing the Draft Guidelines before the end of the year and offer the UKFG as the network to facilitate discussion of them with civil society organisations. We hope that the Guidelines will earn not only the support of UK Food Group members but also farmers throughout the developing world.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick Mulvany  
ITDG  
Chair, UK Food Group

cc: Alex Evans, Special Advisor  
Tim Foy, Natural Resources and Agriculture Policy Division

**KEY POINTS:** We would like to see the following key points included in DFID's agriculture strategy / policy guidelines:

DFID will:

1. Use its influence, and resources, with governments, other donors and in relevant fora at all levels (from local to intergovernmental including the UN) to open up agriculture policy processes to more diverse forms of knowledge and embrace participatory decision-making approaches that will explicitly strengthen the voices of the weak (smallholder farmers, agricultural and food workers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples and other rural and urban poor), especially through social movements, in setting agendas for scientific and technological research as well as in framing policies and regulatory frameworks for food and agriculture. Such an approach would lead DFID, *inter alia*, to:

- support processes, driven by the agendas of the organisations of the poor, that will ensure the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources for food, agriculture and ecosystem services, in an equitable, effective and co-ordinated manner;
  - support the formation of new types of smallholder farmer, pastoralist and fisherfolk organisations and initiatives led by, and able to articulate the needs of, farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk etc, to policymakers in various fora, especially at *meso* levels as well as nationally and internationally, including during PRSP consultations; and
  - support the reform of Ministries of Agriculture (or equivalent) to play a more effective role in rural development facilitating the involvement of smallholder farmer and pastoralist organizations, CBOs, local private sector and civil society.
2. Support land reform initiatives that aim to strengthen, as well as establishing, legal rights of tenure for small-scale farmers, pastoralists and others. Equally, support initiatives that establish rights of access to and control over artisanal fishing grounds and irrigation water resources, and unrestricted access to and control over genetic resources for food and agriculture, for smallholder farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk and other marginalised groups that require sustainable access to these resources. As part of this, increase support to the implementation of international instruments e.g. the International Seed Treaty (ITPGRFA), including the realisation of Farmers' Rights, the Leipzig Global Plan of Action for the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and the programme of work on Agricultural Biodiversity under the Convention on Biological Diversity.
  3. Promote the development and protection of localised food systems producing mainly for local and regional markets through encouraging establishment of targeted support to smallholder farmers, pastoralists and other marginal groups, infrastructure development and in agricultural trade negotiations.
  4. Promote the implementation of the voluntary guidelines for the Right to food in all relevant fora. (These are the recently adopted "Voluntary guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security")
  5. Ensure that there is policy congruence between safety nets and agricultural development.
  6. Support processes to increase corporate regulation including competition laws and setting limits to monopoly power at different links in the food chain.
  7. Explore new approaches to rural livelihood support by funding experimental pilot programmes to develop evidence-based policy and practice by supporting:
    - Innovative partnerships for co-ordinated service delivery
    - Innovative (accountable and decentralized) funding mechanisms that reach the grassroots, e.g. Community Development Funds, Challenge funds etc, accessible by all sectors private, NGOs, CBOs etc.
  8. Balance its support to government and smallholder farmer, pastoralist, fisherfolk organizations, CBOs and NGOs.
  9. Support the exploration of new types of micro-finance products, including insurance, appropriate to support smallholder farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk and others.
  10. Support the African Union and NEPAD in their efforts to persuade national governments to allocate 10 per cent of their public expenditure to agricultural development.

*8th November 2004*