

Comments from the UK Food Group on DFID's draft agriculture policy paper
"Productivity growth for poverty reduction: an approach to agriculture"

The UK Food Group has engaged with DFID in the consultation process on developing these guidelines, in particular in facilitating responses from civil society organisations on the 14 draft Working Papers. We also hosted a seminar on 30 November 2004 at which DFID presented their thinking to date and where farmers from India presented an alternative vision. At the same meeting, concerns were expressed that much of the feedback on the draft Working Papers, including detailed references and evidence, had not been taken into account.

Subsequent to that meeting, on 7 Dec 2004, we wrote to the Secretary of State with a summary of key issues that we felt needed to be addressed, based on the views expressed at that meeting and of those of partners with whom we work in the Global South. Throughout this process there have been concerns expressed by our members that, while the primary focus of the Guidelines has been on improving the contribution of smallholder farmers to agricultural growth, the views of small-scale food producers and their organisations, especially those most in need due to their marginalisation and exclusion, have not been placed centre-stage.

The opportunity to do this in these Guidelines has probably been missed, we fear. Worse, with its focus 'on farmers capable of increasing productivity and creating significant additional employment' (p5), it appears from the way in which it is presented that these Guidelines are abandoning DFID's pro-poor policies and placing emphasis on working with a privileged class of rural people, in the hope that benefits to the poor will 'trickle down'. If this is not the case, as we were lead to believe in the consultation meeting on 8th Sept, why is this perspective given priority and the potential of the safety net, environmental and other multifunctional benefits of agriculture not given equal prominence?

Several members of the UK Food Group have submitted detailed comments on the Guidelines and expressed their views at the 8 September consultation meeting organised by one of our members, Harvest Help. We anticipate these comments will be taken into account when preparing the final paper. In this response we simply want to summarise some of the key issues that are of general concern. We would be willing to discuss these in more detail with those responsible for producing these Guidelines.

IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURE

The current draft usefully raises the profile of agriculture and rural development within the Aid programme and the need to focus on small-scale producers. This is welcome if it were to open up agriculture policy processes to more diverse forms of knowledge and embrace participatory decision-making approaches in policy-making processes and agenda setting for research and development of agricultural science and technology. There is concern that the rationale for DFID's support to agriculture, with its principal focus on 'productivity' and 'growth', misses these decisive elements. Previous submissions to DFID by our members have covered these issues in detail but we fear they are not given the prominence required.

PRINCIPLES and DEFINITIONS

The Guidelines would be enhanced by an opening statement of scope and limitations, that outlines what the Guidelines do and do not cover, and a glossary of definitions, for example for the terms 'productivity' and 'growth'. These are used to mean a number of, sometimes mutually exclusive, things, and can confuse understanding of the multifunctionality of agriculture in terms of benefits, outputs and services. Given the multiplicity of poor people's actions to secure a livelihood, we also wonder who DFID considers to be a farmer, particularly since the paper lacks a gender focus. We are concerned that the implication behind this is that farmers are seen as being predominantly male and, more specifically, men who produce cash crops.

We note several changes in the way the argument for agriculture is presented and the diversity in the articulation of the principles which underpin this e.g. pages 5 and 18. However, it is not made clear how these relate to DFID's 'Hunger strategy' nor to non-market agricultural production nor food production in sectors other than cropping – e.g. livestock, fisheries, forestry – which are often the principal forms of food and livelihoods for the poorest rural producers, especially women.

It is also unclear how the Guidelines relate to implementing other DFID commitments and policies, e.g. to environmental agreements and to recognising the contribution small-scale food production, especially for local markets, can make to environmental sustainability; or DFID's recognition of unjust power relations leading to disempowerment of the poorest, as cited in the draft Environmental Position Paper. We feel that, to a significant degree, this paper has not been situated within the context of DFID's other policy processes and position papers.

There are obvious contradictions in the current draft, which should be ironed out in the final version. But we would draw attention to, for example, the emphasis in the New Technologies section (3.5) on what has to be recognised as the unproven potential of GM technology “to provide significant benefits for poor people” with the evidence in the Sustainability section (2.6) of the multiple benefits of sustainable low input systems to “meeting local needs and aspirations”. There is no attempt in the paper to assess, or propose assessment of, whether current industrial food production systems or potential GM systems of food production are sustainable or not, nor any reference to the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development, which DFID is supporting.

CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

There are several other contentious issues that these draft Guidelines have to tackle, such as protection of common property resources and local markets, sustainability and climate change. However, we feel that three need to be highlighted.

1. Access to and control over land, water and genetic resources: poor peoples control over the productive resources they require to sustain their livelihoods is crucial. This also requires clear policies to protect people and their communities from predation of their natural resources by legal, commercial or other means;
2. The problems caused by forced liberalisation and the opening up of markets as ‘solutions to poverty’ and hence the need for increased regulation of corporate power and inequitable subsidies that drive down prices. In addition, how to deal with failures of international markets be they the classical problem of commodity prices or the newer ‘supply chain’ issues; and
3. Science and technology and the need to protect producers from control of the means of production by or for corporate interests. Also to respect the rights of farmers and indigenous peoples to local knowledge, innovations and practices and productive resources, as required under current international agreements.

On the third point, it should be made clear that DFID will embrace a more inclusive science and technology in order to promote a more diverse, sustainable agriculture. It should also be made clear that DFID will help countries and communities protect themselves, and seek redress as necessary, from the imposition of proprietary, especially GM technologies, as is possible under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

In addressing issues of technology and technology choice, little is said on democratising technology, enabling through participatory farming research, as an example, poor people's participation in generating new or adaptive technologies. There is a sense that these Guidelines are promoting biotechnology (and especially proprietary GM technologies, through for example the AATF) as an example of how to provide quick technological solutions, under the unproven assumptions that this will have a rapid contribution to growth and will help poor people.

For evidence and references on some of these issues, please see the UK Food Group publication "Food inc.: Corporate concentration from farm to consumer"; ITDG et al "Sustaining Agricultural Biodiversity and the integrity and free flow of genetic resources"; and our multiple submissions, especially on behalf of our BOAG members, to the Cabinet Office strategy unit's economic assessment of GM crops. It is with some concern that we learnt that this issue is 'non negotiable' and that DFID has no control over this important area of policy that has such great potential negative impact on poor people.

FUNDING

It is unclear how the priorities listed on pp 35ff will be funded. It would be useful to have an annex identifying the shifts in funding that are necessary to operationalise these Guidelines.

MONITORING

The utility of the Guidelines will need to be demonstrated and for this reason we welcome the commitment to publicly take stock of performance against commitments. It would help if the Guidelines were clearer about the measures that will be used for this and how DFID's accountabilities to poor rural peoples and their organisations will be assessed and how these will be reflected in the assessments of the PSAs on poverty reduction. The UK Food Group will be interested in following this process closely and, in particular, to watch how these Guidelines help developing countries to put into practice the four key areas of policy listed in para 137:

- *“Create a long-term vision for agriculture and to reflect this within their poverty reduction strategies*
- *Ensure the participation of representatives of the rural poor in shaping agricultural policies*
- *Strengthen and, if appropriate, reform public sector institutions so they can deliver important functions which support agricultural development*

- *Ensure that agricultural development strategies provide incentives for the sustainable use of natural resources and environmental services.* “

CONCLUSION

As a network that is concerned with small-scale food producers, food sovereignty and fairness in trading, we welcome DFID's renewed focus on agriculture. Our overall concern, though, is that the paper is both prescriptive and restrictive. In framing its argument in economic terms, it says far too little on the politics of agriculture, the role of small-scale producers and civil society, and the importance of mechanisms for social redress whereby governments are held to account.

Let us be clear that our criticism of the 'productivity and growth' bias of the paper is not to promote subsistence production. It is, rather, to ensure that non market production, sustainability and multifunctionality issues are given more prominence. We would expect the Guidelines to help DFID ensure that the organised voices of poor women in particular are heard. They are the principle food producers in many parts of the world especially Africa, and DFID should ensure that, through its programmes, they are empowered, respected and rewarded for their contribution to hunger alleviation, poverty reduction and environmental sustainability, rather than being either forced out of production or being made to work for a market over which they have no control.

If the Guidelines were reframed in a way to direct systemic support to these vital primary producers of food, DFID's contribution to the wider goals of poverty alleviation, the eradication of hunger, sustainability and improved social justice, as voiced increasingly over the past year with its focus on Africa, could be realised.

There are existing policy instruments available to promote such development, for example the African Union Model Law on Community Rights, that would help DFID to realise its goals. To quote Tewelde Egziabher of Ethiopia, the chief negotiator for the African Union on these issues: *“The aim of the Model Law is to protect the African local community from predation of its biodiversity, technology and knowledge, and to foster its development towards an appropriate industrialisation that does not only have economic growth but also the steady improvement of the wellbeing of every African as its dictate.”*

UKFG
30 September 2005