

PREFACE

It was never going to be easy to evaluate the ten separate research programmes in the UK Government's Department for International Development's (DFID) Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy (RNRRS).

The ten-year strategy was developed at a time of a series of Global Summits and international development gave priority to structural adjustment, sectoral reform and projects. It is being evaluated when the emphasis is on poverty reduction strategies, national budgetary support, and governance reform and on the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. The Strategy was designed to produce generic knowledge and 'public good' technologies and provide continuity in policy, funding and management at a time of anticipated institutional change in the United Kingdom. It piloted the use of logical frameworks in the definition and management of research for development.

The period covered by the Strategy has seen a reduction in the levels of donor, and in many cases national, funding for natural resources sectors and the institutions which serve them; this has reduced the ability of many national institutions to be partners. It has also covered the development of transgenic approaches as one means to address the challenges faced by developing countries and the rise of public concern over food safety. While population growth has started to slow, the numbers of food insecure people has not reduced especially in Africa and the impact of HIV/AIDs is now clearly showing across rural communities. But trade reform, reduction of subsidies and non-tariff barriers in the rich countries, the reform of policies and incentives that might have stimulated investment and activities by the private sector, have not emerged.

To help and advise the Evaluation Team with their complex task, DFID identified and appointed an Evaluation Steering Group of seven people drawn from the UK research councils, professional associations and other national and international organisations with experience with organisation and management of research for development.

The terms of reference and the membership of the Evaluation Steering Group are presented in Annex 2.

The Group met with the Evaluation Team on three occasions at DFID headquarters. Representatives of DFID's Central Research and Evaluation Departments were present at these meetings either in person or by video link. These meetings gave adequate opportunity for open and frank discussion. The conclusions of the Group were minuted and forwarded to the Evaluation Team.

The first meetings of the Group focussed on the approach, methodologies, work plan and planned field visits. The latter meetings were devoted to examining whether the emerging conclusions and recommendations were based on adequate analyses and evidence. However, in carrying out a task of this scale the Evaluation Team formed some clear perceptions and views. These are important even if they are not always supported by data sets and hard evidence.

It was the job of the Group to help guide and inform the evaluation, not to comment on their findings and recommendations.

It is to the credit of the Evaluation Team that they have been able to complete their task and to consolidate their findings into nine clear recommendations with supporting text and some suggested options for the future. We commend these to DFID and look forward to seeing their response.

The Members of the Evaluation Steering Group are most grateful to DFID for the opportunity to help steer the evaluation. They would like to thank the Evaluation Team for their positive and constructive responses to our suggestions and for carrying out their difficult and complex task efficiently and well. They would in particular like to thank the Central Research and Evaluation Departments for their help and support and in particular Elizabeth Warham for acting as the Secretary to the Group.

Finally I would like to thank my colleagues on the Evaluation Steering Group for their wise counsel and capacity to read, digest and comment on a huge quantity of documentation quickly and willingly.

Andrew Bennett
May 2005