

# **CONSULTATION ON DFID RESEARCH FUNDING FRAMEWORK 2005-7**

## **Synthesis of Comments and DFID Response**

### **Background**

1. The DFID research funding framework was launched on the DFID website on the 11 May with a consultation period till 9 July and an e-mail address for responses. The framework was also sent out by e-mail to 581 key stakeholders across all research themes, including those who had submitted researchable ideas for consideration in the new DFID research strategy.

2. Over 20% of recipients responded with a total of 114 responses from various organisations in the UK and overseas (10%) including: academic institutes; research councils; associations/fora; CGIAR Centres; DFID country offices; consultants; unions; and DFID research programmes/centres. We are very grateful for all the comments received, and for the time and care with which they were put together.

### **Response**

3. Many of the comments we agree with. Others related to phraseology, where we had not made our meaning clear. In both cases, we have taken account of them through editorial changes to the funding framework document. The more detailed comments on specific research topics will shape our work as we implement the strategy. Major points are reported below, and a response by DFID is provided where appropriate.

### **Welcome**

4. On the whole there was strong support for the funding Framework, albeit with some caveats. Correspondents particularly liked the emphases on:

- better co-ordination with the UK research councils and other donors;
- capacity building,
- communication,
- Public Private Partnerships (PPP) for product development <sup>1</sup>,
- demand-led research, and
- the retention of a funding window for smallscale, responsive proposals.

### **Process**

5. Some called for a medium-long term strategy (5-10 years) for DFID research. There were suggestions that further development and consultation are needed if the Framework is to engender broad support and involvement from the scientific community. Concern was expressed on a lack of transparency involved in the decision-making process that selected the four main themes; and the omission of any significant consultation with developing countries and research users.

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<sup>1</sup> Some warned about PPPs for service delivery, eg on water, but that is a very different type of arrangement.

6. *Response:* Consultation during formulation of the funding framework was not as extensive as we would have liked. We will consult further in the implementation of the strategy as part of our scoping work to provide more detail on each of the four priority areas of research. The new Chief Scientific Adviser will be looking at DFID's broad science and innovation strategy.

### **Technology versus Social Science**

7. Many commented on an apparent shift towards technology research, with views divided between criticisms and plaudits. There was a fear that DFID believed that the four big topics could be solved just by the development of a new technology. *Response:* We believe that the balance between social and technology research is about right. We have amended the text to show the need for social and well as natural sciences in addressing all four big issues, and our commitment to multi-disciplinary research.

### **Resources**

8. Several thought that even the increased budget is inadequate to achieve the goals anticipated in the Framework document. For example, significantly more support for social development and education research was requested; and it was pointed out that the (very valuable) PPPs for new health products require substantial funds. Many correspondents were also concerned that there is relatively little scope for the development of new initiatives within the budget. They called for resources for unpredicted areas of research, or to commission innovative, bold research that challenges established thinking and practice.

9. *Response:* We recognise this problem. The resources available will become clearer in early 2005, when figures for 2006/7 and 2007/8 will be published, as part of DFID's overall budget plans for those years. We will develop a responsive programme, and a horizon-scanning programme, that encourage new initiatives and innovation.

### **Additional Themes**

10. There was no single topic that was very widely felt to have been wrongly omitted. Proposals were made for more themes within the Framework including: energy (renewable sources); water (resources management, sanitation, health); non-communicable diseases, including tobacco; gender; governance and legal infrastructure (local/global); aid architecture; labour and work (occupational health, ergonomics); rural-urban change and linkages; urbanisation; industrialisation; trade (regional agreements); economics; artisanal mining; information communication technologies; anti-corruption strategies; disaster risk reduction; forestry (community management and non-timber forest products); environmental sustainability and biodiversity; ecology; plant derived medicines; animal welfare; wildlife conservation and trade.

11. *Response:* Some of these are already included, and we have tried to clarify that in the draft. Some will be decided upon in 2005, after the evaluation of the rural (RNRRS) and infrastructure (EngKaR) programmes. One – tobacco - has been added to the current priorities. The additional proposed themes will be considered for the next phase of the DFID research Framework, once the overall budget allocation is clear.

### **In-country capacity building**

12. This received the largest number of comments (38 in total). Correspondents argued that longer-term impact of our research depends upon strong research capacity in developing countries. It was felt that DFID should develop a substantial, structured and long-term coherent strategy with adequate resources. A broad approach is needed not only through collaborative research but also addressing institutional strengthening of national research and extension systems. DFID central funds need to be complemented by strong investment in capacity building, through PRSP processes and/or DFID country offices, with due emphasis on the adequacy of public funding for research. Some criticised poverty reduction budget support as preventing this.

13. Approaches suggested included support to higher degree (MSc/Mphil/PhD) programmes, development of distance-learning courses, budgetary support to key developing country research institutions, building capacity of knowledge users to source, evaluate and utilise existing knowledge/information, and provision for developing country specialists to work on and lead research teams. Funding PhDs within research projects is considered a highly cost-effective way of simultaneously conducting research and building capacity. DFID could also actively encourage the establishment of professional societies in developing countries to provide a forum for researchers, educators, government officials and private sector staff to meet as peers and set professional and technical standards. Funding for generation of relevant databases for baseline conditions in host countries would also be very useful.

14. *Response:* We agree more should be done. The appointment of a DFID Chief Scientific Adviser, and a report by the Office of Science and Technology in the autumn, will take this discussion forward. Major research capacity building is a very long-term process that can only effectively be done at a country level. We believe that budget support builds institutions and financing public services that are essential to effective science capacity. We have to recognise that Governments, and DFID country offices, may decide they have higher immediate priorities than science. However, science and technology is gaining increasing recognition. Where research is a priority, the Central Research Department (CRD) will work with DFID country offices to promote capacity-building - for example jointly with the Wellcome Trust on health research capacity-building in Kenya and Malawi. CRD will also use 'proposals for capacity building' as one of the criteria by which new research management contracts are assessed, and allow doctoral/MSc research to be undertaken within research projects.

## Quality of research, and British collaboration

15. Some correspondents questioned DFID's competence to ensure high quality research, and welcomed links with Research Councils for that reason. There was support for the normal procedure of quality assurance through publication of research results in refereed "academic" journals of international standing. It was suggested that all DFID research should follow rigorous methods of external peer review, of both proposals and final reports to ensure its credibility and worth. There should be consistency and rigour in the way evaluation assessments are conducted. There was a worry that an emphasis on dissemination might result in a dilution of research quality. Likewise, linking research too closely with policy is not always feasible when the timeframes of the two can be very different; and governments are unlikely to encourage research that questions the basis of their policies.

16. On the other hand, others worried that too academic criteria, such as those used by research councils, might mitigate against partnerships with developing country institutions and NGOs, and against more policy-relevant research. Some felt DFID should retain its own research funds and focus on further developing and applying scientific advances in ways particularly relevant to developing countries. Correspondents called for a broad definition of 'research' institutions and the commitment to work with institutions from the North and South. NGOs and Civil Society are seen as playing a vital role in debating policy formulation and improving policy execution. Involving more actors and strengthening innovation systems (linking research suppliers and users), will not only lead to a greater engagement with, and greater ownership of, policy reform, but also helps quicken the pace of technology uptake.

17. On balance, greater collaboration with Funding Councils and other sources of research funding in the UK (esp. HEFCE) was welcomed as long as a number of concerns were addressed. The mechanisms for collaboration should be clearly thought through and address the different agendas, criteria and procedures of different institutions, and not narrow the scope of what can be funded. Care must be taken to ensure that the requirements for co-funding do not waste time and resources and also limit applications from an appropriate range of researchers. The current joint UK Research Council (ESRC, NERC, BBSRC) Rural Economy and Land Use programme studying environmental, economic and social impacts of rural land use in UK was cited as an example of collaboration between Funding Councils and one which might be relevant to much of DFID's work.

18. *Response:* There is a balance to be struck here. We will ensure quality through our new group of Research Managers, by using peer review by independent academics, and by the oversight of the Chief Scientific Adviser. On the other hand, we will ensure criteria for DFID co-funded research that do allow applied proposals, and involve a variety of actors, with the focus on impact.

## Funders Forum

19. Many correspondents felt that UK Funder's Forum could be a very positive development, facilitating collaboration, co-funding, identification of gaps or overlaps

and generally harmonisation of activities. If the Forum is on international development, care needs to be taken to avoid the danger of it becoming too broad. It may be better to support sectoral ones such as the Funder's Forum on Health of Developing Countries, and the Funders Forum on Education Research. DFID could usefully make better use of the UK Agricultural Research Development Forum, as a consultative body.

20. *Response:* We think there is value in an event in 2005 bringing together all research councils and major UK funders in an overall UK Funders' Forum on International Development. That event can promote international issues within the domestic research agenda, and identify and support programmes of common interest. However, we agree that several more specific fora, rather than one overarching forum, may be more practical in the long run, and we will participate actively in them.

### **UK Research Capability**

21. Correspondents suggested that the UK probably has the best national capacity in the world for applied and multi-disciplinary development research and makes a significant contribution in international bodies. However, the last decade has seen serious erosion in British research capacity, closed courses at Universities, lack of appropriately trained UK consultants globally, and (for example) no young Britons at CGIAR centres anymore. Significant concern was expressed on the lack of attention in the Framework on how the UK's considerable research capability can best be sustained and deployed to assist the DFID aid programme. The implications of full economic costing (which UK universities will be introducing in Jan 2005) will need to be taken into consideration in the bidding process for research funds. DFID funded research should be appropriately assessed in the next Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), and the impact of research on policy and practice should be taken into account. The relevant panels need simple and transparent metrics to assess impact of research findings.

22 *Response:* Public support to the UK science community is a matter for Higher Education Funding Councils and Research Councils. DFID's remit is the achievement of development outcomes in poor countries through the most efficient means. However, DFID is keen to retain a strong base in the UK. UK science – natural, physical and social - has a strong comparative advantage in many of our priorities for research, and we are confident that UK science will be able to compete for DFID funds. We will pay the full overheads associated with UK science. We will engage in discussions on the Research Assessment Exercise, especially to explore the issue of the impact of research being taken into account when Higher Education Funding Councils are deciding their funding allocations.

### **International Collaboration**

23. Concern was expressed that donors tend to have a top-down attitude reflecting their own agendas, and that there should also be a forum in which views of other stakeholders can be heard. Agricultural research for development is particularly

well co-ordinated, at both the European and global levels, and this could provide a model for other sectors to emulate. No mention of collaboration at a European level was considered disappointing. DFID could help influence EU Framework Programmes of DG Research for them to be more effective and 'user-friendly' to international research programmes for the poor. *Response:* We are participating in the cross-Whitehall effort on Framework 7.

24. The increased funding allocation to the CGIAR was much commented upon. *Response:* We will consider all the comments, and publish a short brief on our relationships, support for, and impact of the CGIAR on poverty and our engagement in the CGIAR reform process.

### **Public-Private Partnerships for product development**

25. Many appreciated the interest in supporting effective public-private partnerships. It was argued that, after decades of virtual standstill in drug, vaccines and diagnostics research for diseases of poverty, this approach – bridging private and public expertise and resources – is the most likely to deliver the health tools urgently needed. DFID will need to address the complaint from private sector in Europe and developing countries, that high transaction costs and long lead in times associated with donor initiatives discourages involvement.

26. Comments on the private sector went wider than the Framework's focus on PPPs for product development. They suggested more attention to how the private sector can work effectively with civil society e.g. Trade Unions, NGOs and community-based organisations. In agriculture there are opportunities to learn lessons from good examples of successful partnerships from the RNRRS. The central role of major food retailers in UK and Europe is key in shaping developing country agriculture, especially in fresh produce. If smallholder agriculture in Africa is to expand, or even retain any share of valuable world markets the issue of their relationship with OECD retailers and competence to meet their standard needs to be addressed.

*Response:* We note these points, and will consider those for agriculture in 2005 after evaluation of the rural (RNRRS) programmes. However, our major effort will be on product development PPPs, which are a big challenge in themselves.

### **User Demand and Priority Setting**

27. Correspondents wanted more detail on mechanisms for international priority setting. Many suggestions were put forward. MDGs, PRS exercises, agendas of country-specific Development Forums, WTO negotiations schedules, schedules of envisaged regional trading arrangements etc. provide important milestones which could be prioritised with stakeholder participation to help identify such research agendas. Also, DFID should make full use of existing mechanisms for identifying demand – IAASTD (International Assessment of the role of Agricultural Science and Technology in Development), CGIAR, GFAR, and regional fora (FARA, ASARECA, CORAF and SADC) have undertaken extensive exercises to identify demand and priorities for agricultural research. A systematic approach is needed to identifying the

priority problems of poor people, collating data sets already available and noting the commonality of local perceptions of obstacles to improved livelihoods.

28. *Response:* Our proposals to create more coherent, demand led international research priority setting processes are probably the most ambitious part of the funding Framework. We do not underestimate the difficulty of creating genuine demand led research systems, and we agree that we are not fully certain as to how we are going to achieve this. Our strategy is to build upon existing priority setting processes, such as the Global Forum for Agricultural Research, and work with these processes to ensure that the voice of the users is heard. We will also work with international bodies, such as the TDR unit within WHO, to support their role in strengthening international priority setting processes.

### **Dissemination and Uptake Promotion**

29. Many correspondents recommended that dissemination should be across diverse audiences (host/target communities, practitioners, policy decision-makers and professional researchers/academics), North and South. It should be included at every level (i.e. individual projects, research programmes, and DFID centrally). There is also a need to pay more attention to exit strategies for projects, and to consolidate outputs of different projects for easier uptake, with adequate time and resources. New methods of delivering information need to be explored, including those that extract relevant information and put it into the local context, repackaging for different audiences etc. Websites and/or cds with information are not enough to facilitate knowledge transfer. DFID should ensure that the results from its research are added to existing data-bases (CABI, FAO, and EU (Infosys)), and that developing countries are assisted in accessing such information. With online courses, the latest technologies can be effectively applied, using internet, satellite radio, and digital video to great effect. Important are software tools for local use to enable developing country doctors and educators to produce their own material.

*Response:* These are valuable points that will be considered as we develop the Communications work.

### **DFID Country Offices**

30. There was a call for closer involvement of DFID country offices. Some argued that they should develop matching programmes to deliver the results of centrally-funded research.

31. *Response:* The primary target of research is not DFID country offices, but a much broader audience in the development community, above all in developing countries. Each research programme will include a dissemination strategy, to entice a wide range of actors, including national research systems, NGOs and the private sector. Increased CRD investment in communication should also ensure that research results reach audiences who can translate them into action. DFID country offices are not staffed or focussed on research dissemination. However, we will provide country offices with much better information about DFID-funded research,

and identify areas of their focus which can be informed by CRD research. We will also work closely with DFID Policy Division.

## Research Management Systems

32. Suggestions were made on the merits and disadvantages of different types of research management systems. Many correspondents felt that there should be an evaluation of a range of management systems, to permit lesson learning from the past, and avoid new procedures when they already exist in a well tested form.

*Response:* The evaluations of the RNRRS and ENKAR programmes will address research management systems. They, the tri-ennial reviews of the health knowledge programmes and the mid-term reviews of the Social Science DRCs, will inform our design of new DFID research programmes.

## Other points

33. Other points included:

- **Research synthesis** and systematic reviews are important as a means of getting research into practice by policy makers and users, and strengthening design of new studies. *Response:* We agree.
- The emphasis on the **MDGs** was understood but several correspondents felt there is a need to promote research that strengthens these targets by identifying local research issues and priorities. It was also felt that it would be an advantage at this stage to have a clear idea of how the key priorities will help attain MDGs via output-to-purpose linkages.
- There was a request for more attention to **agricultural productivity outside Africa**, especially in the semi-arid tropics. *Response:* We have changed the wording to "Sustainable agriculture especially in Africa". We keep our focus on Africa as it has the worst poverty reduction projections and the least capacity to address problems through research, but recognise the possibility of funding some agricultural research outside.
- There was a suggestion that most of DFID's funding go into a **Development Science Research Council**. In the Select Committee discussions, Tony McWalter MP proposed a similar body, but with the funding from Research Councils rather than DFID. *Response:* This proposal deserves further consideration.
- Concern that **delays** in identifying the new research themes means research teams are disbanding. *Response:* Immediately the consultation closed, we searched the comments for references to the proposed new themes for bilateral programmes, and advertised in mid-August the ones for which there were no objections.
- **Chief Scientific Adviser:** Various suggestions were made for the role of the DFID Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA). *Response:* The CSA will work very closely with Central Research Department.

Central Research Department  
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