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I am writing to express my concern at the gross misrepresentation of our programme in Andhra Pradesh (AP) in the document, *'Prajateerpu: a citizens' jury/scenario workshop on food and farming futures for Andhra Pradesh, India'*, by Michel Pimbert and Tom Wakeford, jointly published by IDS and IIED. And I am surprised and disappointed that your staff member, Dr Michel Pimbert, did not feel it necessary to cross-check his information with us. This is surely standard practice in seeking to portray an accurate picture of a third party's actions, and Dr Pimbert was, I understand, aware that DFID disputed his claims.

The *Prajateerpu* document, and the campaign with which IDS has associated itself, starts from a highly flawed position. It gives the Vision 2020 document a status far higher than it has in reality, and consequently the argument put forward by your researchers is based on a false premise. Vision 2020 presents a view of how Andhra Pradesh might develop over the next 20 years. It contains ideas on a wide range of issues. It is not a fixed policy framework, and it is nonsense to suggest that every idea contained in it is government policy. There are no plans attached to it, nor projects that DFID could fund if it wished to. In fact, a major criticism of Vision 2020 to date is that it contains no plan of action, and that government has been slow to formulate specific strategies and policies.

Policy and programmes evolve in Andhra Pradesh as they do in every country, state and organisation. It is undisputed that Vision 2020 was commissioned by, and belongs to, the Government of Andhra Pradesh (GoAP), which is democratically elected. It was published for consultation and anyone is welcome to provide a critique of this vision, but this should be directed at GoAP rather than DFID. We continue to have discussions with government on a range of issues critical to poverty reduction. We welcome constructive civil society engagement which can be very valuable in bringing in the perspectives of poor people, but uninformed and unfounded criticism is highly unlikely to forward the cause of poverty reduction.

More generally, the implication made by IDS and other NGOs involved in this matter is that DFID engagement with a government necessarily means that we support every policy in every detail. This is also nonsense. If we worked only with governments who agreed with us in every respect, we would do nothing. DFID makes a judgement whether a government is committed to poverty reduction, and whether we can effectively contribute to their programmes and dialogue on policy options. In the case of Andhra Pradesh, we have taken the view that they are and we can. Dialogue and discussion are central to our approach, but ownership is critical and must be respected. DFID does not dictate the policies of a foreign government, and I assume it is not IDS's position that we should be seeking to.

Our much publicised and misrepresented £65 million grant was provided to support a programme of economic and governance reforms. It has been wrongly labelled as funding for Vision 2020, and was incorrectly described in the *Prajateerpu* document as being directed towards agricultural reform. There was some discussion at the concept stage of the reform programme of including policy changes that would accelerate agricultural growth, recognising the central importance of agriculture

in tackling poverty. But these were not included, as there was insufficient analytical work and debate and discussion prior to the design of the programme for government to be able to determine what changes they should implement. There was no attempt to lift ideas directly from Vision 2020 and include them.

I am interested that IDS supports the approach that has been taken to this issue and campaign. The report of the jury is very revealing – the caricaturing of the different scenarios (which is even mentioned in the report by one of the observers), the skewing of information show that there was not a balanced review of alternative future scenarios, in all their complexity, as claimed by its supporters. The position on GM crops is a case in point. The report clearly says that the farmers knew nothing about GM crops, had not heard of them, before the event. However in the space of few hours, with the organisers choosing their own experts, is it credible that they got a wholly balanced, well-informed and disinterested view on such a complex issue?

In any case, Vision 2020 makes no specific mention of widespread planting GM crops, and the only place 'genetic engineering' is mentioned is in a section on Knowledge and Research in the fields of genetic engineering and biotechnology. These broad areas relate to a much wider range of technologies than just the genetic modification of crops. Research in these areas is not a bad thing, and there is no reason why Andhra Pradesh should be excluded from the work being carried out by scientists around the world or from the debate on the application of technology and scientific advance. We do not believe that it is wrong for the state to encourage research into new high-yielding varieties of rice, nor that it is better, for example, for poor farmers in the state to continue to struggle with poor varieties of seed. DFID has for many years supported research of this kind as part of our work to tackle poverty, and do not see the statements in Vision 2020 as necessarily harmful to the interests of the poor.

Both the Government of India and the Government of Andhra Pradesh have recently approved the limited introduction of Bt cotton. Local civil society activists should lobby their own governments if they wish to object to this. DFID is not supporting the introduction of GM crops in Andhra Pradesh, or elsewhere in India. Our position on GM crops is clear, and argues for caution, rather than blanket opposition. We oppose the introduction of GM crops, which disadvantage poor farmers or involve risks to the environment and human health. However, it would be wrong to deny poor people access to technologies, which will directly improve their livelihoods and are environmentally benign. DFID is therefore willing to support developing country governments, committed to poverty reduction strategies, to set up effective institutions and regulatory systems to control the introduction of GM crops if they request assistance.

I must address some more specific points: the document claims that "...there is little or no evidence that ... DFID have used appropriate methodologies to bring the 'voices of the poor' into the planning and design of their aid programmes in Andhra Pradesh." This allegation is false and if the researchers had taken the slightest trouble to consult us, which they could have done easily as we have offices in both Hyderabad and New Delhi, they would have discovered a very different story. They found "no evidence" because they did not look for it. The DFID Andhra Pradesh strategy, developed in 2000, was the subject of wide consultation, and our two largest programmes most directly focussed on tackling rural and urban poverty are highly participative.

The work we are funding in rural Andhra Pradesh (the Andhra Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Project, APRLP) is based on an extremely thorough analysis of the problems and priorities of the rural poor, not just in Andhra Pradesh, but across India. This analysis draws on work done by literally dozens of other agencies, research institutes and NGOs and includes a great deal of participatory research. In addition, the implementation of this project follows a very consultative process that includes all stakeholders; its first year of operation has been almost entirely taken up with understanding people's perceptions and priorities for tackling poverty. A key objective of the project is to enable government officials to become more responsive to the needs of poor communities. Similarly, the

large Urban Services for the Poor project has a very large component for participation and strengthening the ability of the poor to demand better services. In looking for evidence of DFID's approach, it would have been sensible to start with the source.

When we spoke to the Andhra Pradesh farmers visiting UK, it was clear that the APRLP approach was entirely in keeping with the support that they are seeking to better secure their livelihoods. We have offered to continue the dialogue with the farmers, which they welcomed, and will set this up in the near future now that they are back in India. We would have been happy to talk to them – or Dr Pimbert – in India earlier had they approached us, which they did not.

I also find the attitude towards the World Bank revealing. In contrast to the view implied in the *Prajateerpu* document, we do not see engagement with them as something sinister to be avoided. The Bank's rural development work in Andhra Pradesh – the District Poverty Initiatives Project – is doing some very valuable work to tackle rural poverty, is also based around the participation of community local groups and has an explicit focus on representation of the poorest. It provides funding directly to grassroots organisations to address poverty in the way they see fit. The Bank is a major development player in Andhra Pradesh and globally, having a commitment to poverty and substantial resources and expertise to offer. We will continue to work with them on a range of issues.

I am amazed that an organisation such as IDS, with a strong international reputation for rigour and objective research, has not only to put its name to this exercise, but has also publicised it. A straw man is set up and then knocked down - an easy and cheap trick, if the straw man is a caricature and hard evidence is avoided - but hardly rigorous research. Your press release on 15 March 2002 was combined with a press release from a group of NGOs with the headline that "UK Government funds scheme to throw 20 million Indian farmers off their land". Christian Aid, one of the NGOs who put their name to this second press release, has since stated that it did not suggest that the government is physically throwing people off the land. I find this statement incredible, and it is clear that, whatever their intent, this is the "fact" that has been picked up by press reports and MPs, and continually features in the letters we are receiving. You must know that effective advocacy has to be evidence-based. It is a waste of everyone's time to lobby against something that is not true, and such action quickly undermines credibility.

Finally, I note that the Government of Andhra Pradesh and others in civil society, who know our programme well, are astonished at this campaign and the allegations made against DFID. Such unfounded criticism is deeply unhelpful and undermines public support for aid, to say nothing of the time and energy expended on countering it. Tackling deep rural poverty in Andhra Pradesh is difficult, particularly where people have few assets or are otherwise disadvantaged. There are many interwoven issues and no quick fix. We will continue to work with the Government of Andhra Pradesh to develop appropriate policies and programmes across a wide range of areas, and with those NGOs who are interested in tackling poverty rather than primarily focussed on attacking the government.

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