



A. P. COALITION IN DEFENCE OF DIVERSITY

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Mr Keith A. Bezanson
Mr Nigel Cross

Director, Institute of Development Studies (IDS)
*Director, International Institute for Environment
and Development (IIED)*

Dear Mr Bezanson and Mr Cross

In a special meeting today of the AP Coalition in Defence of Diversity, which is a network of over 142 civil society groups in the state of Andhra Pradesh, we discussed with great concern the bizarre happenings between DFID, IDS and IIED on the *Prajateerpu*.

As people who know every nook and corner of our state, and as people who have been grassroots workers with our people, especially the small and the marginal, Dalits and women we are amazed at the kind of interpretations that are being made of the unique process called *Prajateerpu*. Like IDS and IIED, we are all deeply rooted in participatory processes and have contributed to the international debate and pedagogy on participation through our studies, grassroots processes and films. Therefore it is even more incredible for us why some of the leading institutions of the world who have played an inspirational role for the practitioners of participation across the globe are behaving the way they are behaving in the case of *Prajateerpu*.

As people who were a part of the *Prajateerpu*, we stand by each moment of it and each word of the report that came out of it. The thought, design and execution of the process and the report was a combined effort of the AP Coalition, Dr Pimbert and Dr Wakeford, who worked side by side with us and played a commendable role in publishing it. We thought both your institutes would feel proud of them and reward them for their impeccable, unbiased report, which amplified the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable in such unambiguous terms. It takes more than professional competence to do this, which they no doubt have in plenty, it takes an extraordinary sensitivity and enormous courage. For this very reason, your institutions should have rewarded them. But alas, you have chosen to do quite the opposite. And it is so disappointing and dismaying that it will surely raise serious doubts about the professional honesty of IDS and IIED among the development community in this country which is going to debate your actions in the weeks to come. Ultimately if this results in a complete distrust of the two institutions in the minds of most development agencies in this country, this action of yours will be to blame.

The role of DFID in this entire sordid episode, we find, is most despicable. By showing itself as an arm-twisting bully, DFID has followed the highly avoidable path of the World Bank, which through its actions has become a symbol of evil for small people and organisations, which represent them. As one of our esteemed colleagues Madhu Sarin says, "People will start queuing in front of DFID offices in protest against its anti-people policies".

At least we can understand DFID, which is a bureaucratic institution prone to blunder and therefore has the need to save its back. But why should two most esteemed institutions which have stood for justice, equity and participation and have published books like *Putting the Last First, Farmers First, Whose Reality Counts?* etc. have to behave this way is a mystery we can never fathom. Since both the institutions have not offered any plausible explanation for their incredible actions, we can only surmise that they have allowed themselves to be arm twisted by DFID and acted in the interest of their own future funding. If true, this is the saddest day for both your institutions. You have not helped their reputation either.

IDS has really failed its thousands of admirers in the academic and development world by unilaterally withdrawing the *Prajateerpu* report without consulting its Indian partners. We know IDS receives nearly 70% of its funds from DFID. But that should not have led to such a self-demeaning action.

We are also surprised that the Director of IIED did not think it proper to consult his Indian partners once DFID started its campaign against the *Prajateerpu* process. Nor were we told that DFID has asked in writing that the report be taken off the website [which according to us is an outrageous demand]. We do not see that DFID has any legitimacy in raising either of the two objections. It has no known expertise in participatory communication nor does it know Andhra Pradesh and its policies better than us, the partners of *Prajateerpu*.

One of the *Prajateerpu* partners was the School of Communication, University of Hyderabad, which is one among the five world-renowned central universities in India and is recognised as a centre of excellence by the University Grants Commission, the apex body of Indian universities. The University's School of Communication is the top school in the country in development communication and probably the only such university institution in the country that formally teaches participatory methodologies. The two top scholar-professors of the School, who were an integral part of the process with their graduate students and Ph D scholars, have strongly endorsed *Prajateerpu* as a model process for making the marginalised voices heard. One of them now heads the Government of India's Indian Institute of Mass Communication, the topmost development communication school in the country. Both of them fully stand by the process and the report of *Prajateerpu* and say that they are "outraged" by the action of IDS.

We wonder whether IDS, when it took off the report from its website and bookshop, considered all these aspects or just acted out of fear of losing its grant from DFID. We also wonder whether it instituted a serious peer review process to defend the academic integrity of its researchers or merely a sham inquiry that buckled under other considerations. Whichever is the case, its actions will leave an indelible feeling of sadness in the minds of all of us who have held the Institute as an ideal to follow.

We can see further evidence of this in this week's update on the IIED/IDS websites, where the following paragraph appears:

The Prajateerpu: Citizens' Jury process described below has been facilitated by IIED and IDS, in collaboration with a range of Indian partner organisations. Both IIED and IDS fully support participatory action research as a means of eliciting the perceptions and views of those affected by policy. The methodology of citizens' juries and scenario workshops is still at an experimental stage, and as with any participatory process or research approach it has strengths and drawbacks that need to be borne in mind. While continuing to provide open access to the final report, we will shortly be posting a DFID statement correcting errors of fact.

Your reaffirmation of support to participatory action research is welcome. But the fact that you feel it necessary to make such a statement is interesting. That indicates a sense of guilt and self-doubt in you and your wonderment whether you are perceived the same way by others. This is utterly sorrowful. Furthermore, if DFID has the right to post its statement, will that entitle all of us to have our feelings, sentiments and the errors we see in your action posted on the website? That would be true participation, transparency and good governance, which DFID claims to be teaching Third World governments.

As people working in Andhra Pradesh, in its villages with the poorest, we know our Vision 2020 like the back of our hand. We know what it says and what it doesn't. We know what its impact is going to be. And we refuse to be educated on it by DFID. Therefore when you rely on DFID rather than Indian

organisations and development communities like us, we wonder, where your rhetoric of *Whose Reality Counts?* has vanished.

Please, for the sake of God, truth, honesty and ethics of participatory values, do not waste more time before correcting your actions.

1. IDS, please put back the report on your website and in your bookshop.
2. IIED and IDS, please make us regular partners in your debate on the *Prajateerpu*. It is our right because we are also organisers of the event. And we know a bit about research and participation.
3. Please put our endorsement of the process on the website as a re-affirmative statement by the largest coalition of civil society organisation in Andhra Pradesh.
4. Please honour the two valiant researchers who made the research and the report possible, brought into the open the hidden and unheard voices and caused this extraordinarily useful debate for civil society.

We hope that you will take due note of our anguished reaction and stand by the 19 small people who represented in the *Prajateerpu* over 40 million women and men from their communities and the 142 civil society groups with over a million membership in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

With warm regards

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| 1. | C Hanumantha Reddy | <i>Dalit Bahujan MACs Samakhya</i> , Chittoor District, AP |
| 2. | V Siva Sankar | <i>RAKSHANA</i> , Guntur District, AP |
| 3. | K Nageswara Reddy | <i>PAID</i> , Cuddappah District, AP |
| 4. | M Srinivas | <i>SVDS</i> , Visakhapatnam District, AP |
| 5. | S A Shameer | <i>SPEAK INDIA</i> , Nellore District, AP |
| 6. | K Damodar | <i>SEED</i> , Warangal District, AP |
| 7. | G Mohan | <i>ACTION</i> , East Godavari District, AP |
| 8. | K Skylab | <i>DRDSO</i> , Mahaboobnagar District, AP |
| 9. | R Gopala Rao | <i>ROSES</i> , Vizianagaram District, AP |
| 10. | K Sadiq | <i>SEEDS</i> , Anantpur District, AP |
| 11. | K Premnath | <i>DRDSO</i> , Mahaboobnagar District, AP |
| 12. | B N Chetty | <i>Janvikas Society</i> , Kurnool District, AP |
| 13. | H R Prakash | <i>ARTIC</i> , Srikakulam District, AP |
| 14. | R N Rao | <i>SAHARA</i> , Karimnagar District, AP |
| 15. | G Yadava Reddy | <i>NAVAJYOTHI</i> , Medak District, AP |
| 16. | Jayasri | Joint Convenor |
| 17. | Satheesh, P V | Convenor |

CORE TEAM, AP COALITION IN DEFENCE OF DIVERSITY