

To:
Robert Graham-Harrison
Head DFID India
British High Commission
B28, Tara Crescent
Qutab Institutional Area
New Delhi 110 016
India

12 July 2002

Dear Mr Graham-Harrison,

Prajateerpu: A Citizens Jury / Scenario Workshop on Food and Farming Futures for Andhra Pradesh, India

We were surprised when we were shown the letter you wrote to our respective directors at IIED and IDS on May 3, 2002. We were equally surprised to discover that your original letter, and parts of IDS and IIED's official response to DFID India, were subsequently used by DFID in correspondence with other organisations and individuals. We now write to you in our personal capacity as researchers and concerned citizens – neither of us claiming to speak on behalf of our respective institutions.

As co-authors of the report, we address the criticisms you have made of *Prajateerpu* in the order they were made in your original letter.

Misrepresentation of DFID

We reject your accusation of misrepresentation. Your letter goes under the assumption that DFID knows better what is going on than the project team (two of whom were from Andhra Pradesh, one from an Indian government programme, and two from IIED/IDS)¹. One of the report authors (Michel Pimbert - hereafter MP) has worked on sustainable agriculture and rural livelihoods issues in Andhra Pradesh (AP) since the late 1980s. Both MP and Tom Wakeford (TW) have been involved in research on the *Prajateerpu* process for the last two years. Furthermore, if you look at page ii of the report you will see that along with a respected local academic and an experienced development worker, a member of the Government of AP's own staff was part of the team who facilitated the whole process in their native language.

Prior to publishing the *Prajateerpu* report, we cross-checked its contents with all the project organisers and other partners in Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere in India. They endorsed it. You yourself also endorsed the process in a video-conference meeting between farmers who had come to London from Andhra Pradesh and senior officials from DFID India and UK, when you said "the paper produced by the citizen's jury, which details their vision, in relation to access to resources, agriculture and environment - really we would go wholeheartedly with almost all that is in there." Later in the same conference you added "We very much agree with the broad thrust of the jury. ...We broadly agree with the thrust of the citizens jury"².

¹ The five organisations involved in running *Prajateerpu*, -a Citizens Jury/Scenario Workshop on Food and Farming Futures in Andhra Pradesh were: The University of Hyderabad, The Andhra Pradesh Coalition in Defence for Diversity, The all India National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan and, in the UK, The Institute of Development Studies and the International Institute for Environment and Development.

² All such references refer to transcripts taken from a video-recording made at DFID on April 4, 2002 by the Andhra Pradesh Coalition in Defence of Diversity, one of the organisations running the *Prajateerpu* process.

DFID India did have the opportunity to inform and become engaged in the deliberative process as members of our Oversight Panel, which was able to critically review the process at the end of each day's deliberations. Sadly, DFID India staff declined to become involved as Oversight Panel members – or even to inform themselves by attending as observers - despite repeated invitations from MP and TW. Our invitations to both your Delhi and Hyderabad office staff were renewed at least 10 times between April and June 2001 (see annex 1 for a summary of e-mail correspondence). The potential significance of *Prajateerpu* was clearly spelt out to your staff. We respectfully submit that DFID India made an error of judgement in deciding not to participate in the *Prajateerpu* process. A new and extraordinary claim, made in your second letter to the Director of IIED, suggests that your senior colleagues have questioned the lack of DFID India representation at *Prajateerpu*. Your letter of 24 June 2002 gives a misleading statement concerning DFID India's behaviour. To quote:

"You will appreciate that DFID is invited to many events and cannot participate in all of them. A senior staff member of the Andhra Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Project that DFID supports did attend, and she was asked to send the jury verdict directly to us in Delhi, which she did. As you correctly surmise, lack of direct involvement by one of our advisers did not represent a lack of interest."

The implication of your statement is that the person in question, Sudha Goparaju, was asked to attend the meeting by DFID. In fact almost the opposite was the case. One of us (MP) approached Dr Goparaju to act as one of our three facilitators, which she undertook as unpaid leave of absence. Dr Goparaju has clearly stated that she was *not* representing DFID at the *Prajateerpu* event held on 25 June to 1 July 2001.

Vision 2020

Your description of Vision 2020 is not accurate. For the Government of AP (GoAP), Vision 2020 provides clear directions and priorities for development throughout the State. Moreover, Vision 2020 has led to the formulation of specific strategies, policies and government orders. For example, the official web site of the GoAP includes the following 2002 Strategy Papers: Governance and Public Management, Infrastructure, Agriculture and Allied Departments, Poverty Eradication, Fiscal Reforms, Power, and Public Sector Reform. The Government's Policy papers on Infrastructure and Biotechnology, for example, can also be found on its official web site. Most of the official strategy papers and policy documents present milestones and development indicators. All explicitly mention Vision 2020 as the source of their thinking and legitimacy. Moreover, the GoAP has recently told its officers that their performance evaluation and promotions will depend on their ability to achieve the targets mentioned in Vision 2020.

Nowhere to our knowledge does the GoAP use "might" in relation to the implementation of Vision 2020. As you know, the GoAP is using Vision 2020 together with its Strategy Papers and Policy documents to solicit funds from donors such as DFID and the World Bank. If by saying "might" you are conceding that DFID is no longer as keen on supporting the original Vision 2020 as it did a year ago then this is merely evidence of *Prajateerpu*'s success at giving excluded groups a bigger voice in the reform of development plans for AP, and in the wider policy process.

We completely agree that DFID has to make a judgement as to "whether a government is committed to poverty reduction" before it hands over funds. In this case the conclusion reached by the *Prajateerpu* process is that the GoAP's present strategies do not show a commitment to poverty reduction – a commitment that should be judged by actions, not words. Providing money to a development model (Vision 2020) that will, directly or indirectly, contribute to the removal of the rural poor from their lands and the loss of their food security is not a "detail" as you claim (para 4, line 2).

We note from your letter to the Director of IIED that you now suggest that the interview briefing given to the Straits Times newspaper by a DFID official, who seemed to suggest that DFID wholeheartedly backed GoAP's Vision 2020, was wrongly reported. However you seemed to back Vision 2020 yourself during the video conference of April 4th:

“Our role is to support the Government of Andhra Pradesh. We are talking about an elected government. They have sought our assistance. We are providing them financial assistance. We are also encouraging them, helping them to be more accountable to and more responsive to poor. And I think that the Vision they state is an agreeable one”.

DFID budgetary support to Vision 2020

In criticising the *Prajateerpu* report (para 5), you misrepresent what we wrote about DFID funding in AP. We do not specifically mention the £65 million grant for economic and governance reforms to which you refer. Instead, we present information on how DFID funds *interrelated and mutually supportive* elements of the GoAP's Vision 2020. On page 11 of the *Prajateerpu* report, the four main pillars of DFID's budgetary support to the government of AP are identified as: Power Sector Reform and Restructuring, Fiscal Reform, Governance Reform and Rural Development/Agricultural Reform. We further state that “both DFID and the World Bank work closely to help the AP government refocus its spending priorities and divest functions and services where this is more appropriate. Specific support efforts are made to strengthen the Government of AP's capacity to manage the privatisation programme outlined in Vision 2020”. The source of this information was primarily DFID's own Strategy Paper for Andhra Pradesh (DFID India, April 2001) and correspondence with DFID Headquarters in London.

Given the State-wide transformations proposed by Vision 2020, we were interested in tracking all interrelated aspects of DFID's budgetary support to the GoAP, rather than just looking at the agricultural sector in isolation. This was consistent with an analysis that combined both the livelihoods perspective with the study of the entire food system (i.e. the production aspects of food and also processing, distribution, marketing and access to food). The food system focus led us to examine DFID India's support to reforms in the power/energy sectors and to the fiscal/policy shifts needed to link the state of Andhra Pradesh with agricultural export markets, long distance transport and global commodity chains.

Methodological design and bias

Your letter takes a patronising tone towards the jurors, who have day-to-day knowledge of poverty and the potential opportunities and threats to their livelihood assets. Sadly, paragraph 6 of your letter betrays your lack of confidence in the ability of the poor to analyse their realities and plan for the future on the basis of their collective needs, priorities and knowledge. Perhaps therein lie some of the fundamental reasons for your profound mistrust of the *Prajateerpu* process and its outcomes. Moreover, since DFID India staff declined to attend the jury, despite repeated invitations from us, it is hardly surprising that you and your advisors do not understand either the theory or the practice of the *Prajateerpu* process.

What is surprising to us is that when talking to the Indian farmers delegation on April 4, you stated your “wholehearted support” for the citizens jury process - not once, but three times - and yet when writing to the Directors of IDS and IIED a few days later you condemn the process:

“I am amazed that an organisation such as IDS (& IIED), with a strong international reputation for rigour and objective research, has not only 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”.

If the support you expressed on April 4 is DFID’s position then this is good news and reassuring. We have always remained confident that the wider DFID community is not against using such participatory methods as citizens’ juries and scenario workshops to expand deliberative democracy and good governance. However, we feel you should provide us, and our Indian partners, with an explanation as to why you have praised the AP farmer jury’s insights to their face, and then undermined them behind their back.

We do not claim to have designed and facilitated a perfect and flawless deliberative process. We are quite candid in our report in describing mistakes, limitations and omissions. However, you misunderstand the value of citizens’ juries, visioning exercises, the use of evocative images and even caricature to help open up a broad range of framing assumptions and boundaries for a deliberative process.

You misunderstand the comment on “caricaturing of different scenarios”, which was indeed made by one of the oversight panel members, Mr. Y.N. Naidu, but as part of a *positive* comment on the engaging nature of the videos (see section 4.5 on page 42 and section 4.13 on page 53). By offering diverging visions of the future of food and farming in AP, the videos were meant to enrich debate by eliciting associations, stimulating thoughts and a rethinking of starting points, ideas and normative positions. The videos’ main function was to impress on the non literate and literate audiences present that different constructions of “reality” are indeed possible and that framing assumptions behind future policies are open to contestation and change. But we were careful not to allow the videos to exclude other possible options and alternative framings of food and farming futures in AP. From the outset of *Prajateerpu*, the jurors and specialist witnesses were encouraged not to just choose between visions 1, 2 or 3 but to actively imagine and invent a new fourth scenario of their own.

Moreover, the videos were merely the opening prompt to five days of deliberation in which jurors listened and cross-examined a range of witnesses speaking both in favour and against all three scenarios. These witnesses had usually taken the time to watch the video and therefore were fully able to rebut anything they thought was inaccurate in them, and in other witnesses’ testimonies. Some of them did exactly this. The videos should thus not be judged in isolation but as part of a larger methodological design with inbuilt checks and balances. Our strategy was aimed at overcoming the partial and incomplete nature of each method and its outputs (e.g. scenario workshops, videos, citizen jury) by combining them in particular sequences so that the internal rigour and credibility of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Overall, we think that robust and trustworthy conclusions have emerged out of the complex and dynamic interactions between the methods, arguments, actors and extended peer community that, together, formed the *Prajateerpu* process.

Prajateerpu was overseen by an independent panel of observers, which included a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India and a First Secretary, Netherlands Embassy. We suggest you consult these senior and independent observers before throwing an accusation of bias. It is particularly ironic that you complain about “skewed information” when DFID India was invited to be on the panel of observers and also give evidence on its programmes in AP, yet declined to do either.

Genetically Modified Organisms

We note that you are no longer using the words that Clare Short used in a letter to the Guardian on April 4, 2002 when she claimed that “There are no references to GM crops” and referred readers to the GoAP website, which clearly described the use of genetic engineering (the original and still the

most widely used term for GM in India). Your claim that "Vision 2020 makes no specific mention of widespread planting of GM crops" (para 7) is factually incorrect. The GoAP's policy paper on biotechnology offers a bold account of how genetic engineering is expected to transform food and farming in accordance with Vision 2020 (see "Biotechnology Policy 2001" on www.andhrapradesh.com)

Those witnesses promoting Vision 2020, especially those from the GoAP clearly saw GM crops as a crucial part of the strategy, leading the jury to make a rejection of current GM technologies such a prominent part of their verdict. You make (incorrect) assumptions about the personal views of the organisers on the general issue of GM crops, yet we merely reported the views of the jurors.

Listening to the voices of the poor

You give the Andhra Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Programme (APRLP) as an example of participatory approaches funded by DFID (para 10). Whilst we did not specifically mention this DFID/GoAP project in our report we are familiar with it. Indeed, one of us (MP) was asked by senior staff of APRLP if he would be willing to evaluate this project this year. APRLP is a remarkable social experiment, not least because it is the largest Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Programme support initiative of DFID worldwide. And whilst it is too early to see concrete results on the ground, we are happy to agree with you that *some* participatory methods have been used in consultations. Moreover, the livelihoods concept guiding the work *is* people-centred and inclusive of the poor.

Nowhere in our report do we say that DFID does not use participatory methods. Our comments on the lack of "use of appropriate methodologies to bring the voices of the poor into the planning and design of aid programmes" refer to questions of scale, quality of participation and independent oversight of participatory processes.

Scale and extent of participation in DFID India's aid projects in AP: We recognise that the APRLP, the Urban and Social Development work supported by DFID all use participatory methods to varying degrees (e.g. PRA/RRA, stakeholder analysis, focus group discussions.). But these "sectors" represent a tiny fraction of the total DFID aid to the GoAP. Out of a total of £91,536,000 of DFID aid to AP in 2001-02, a mere 1% (£1,000,000) was allocated to the Rural Livelihoods sector, 5% (£4,700,000) to Urban Development support and 0.2% (£266,000) to Social Development. The lion's share went to Economic and Public Service Reform and Power Sector Reform, respectfully 71% (£65,000,000) and 13.5% (£12,400,000) of the total DFID allocation to AP (DFID Headquarters correspondence, 1 March 2002). The latter sectors represent the bulk of DFID aid to AP in 2001-02 (a combined 84.5% of the total). We looked in particular for clear evidence for the use of appropriate methodologies for democratic deliberation and inclusion of the poor in the overall design of the DFID supported *structural reforms* in the Public Services / Economic and Power Sectors (e.g. combinations of PRA/PLA, citizens juries, consensus conferences, scenario workshops, deliberative polling, and visioning exercises). We found no evidence for the widespread use of participatory methodologies in these key sectors of DFID support to Vision 2020.

Quality of participation: We are in contact with an extensive network of NGOs and academics in India that give us reason to doubt the quality of participatory research funded by DFID. As independent researchers we had a responsibility to report this. The group of AP farmers who met DFID officials in London on April 4 said in a letter to the Guardian on April 6th: "As small farmers and concerned Indian citizens, we have monitored the "consultation" process to which Clare Short (Letters, April 4) refers. This generally has consisted of three-and-a-half hour meetings during which government officials spend over three hours outlining their plans, the remaining few minutes being dominated by the voices of already wealthy farmers...Earlier this week we invited ourselves to the DFID's London offices. Senior civil servants gave us a guarantee that they will now begin a dialogue

with Andhra Pradesh's poorest farmers. But we would like the department to provide more evidence that its current funding is being used to alleviate poverty rather than increase it.”

Independent oversight: Nor did we find evidence that the process of needs identification and prioritisation of aid were overseen by independent panels made up of different actors, including representatives of the poor and marginalised. There is a strong rationale for democratising policy processes, science and the allocation of resources (including aid) in an age of uncertainty by directly involving “extended peer communities” or multi-actor oversight panels in the production and validation of knowledge and policy decisions. This is essential to ensure that both methods and outcomes are credible, impartial, relevant and trustworthy. In the absence of extended peer review and external verification by an independent oversight panel it is difficult to be confident that British aid has not been captured by powerful interest groups in AP.

These are the main reasons why we wrote on page 58 of our report that “There has been no *systematic* and *widespread* use of inclusive participatory methodologies to understand local realities and make the priorities of the poor count in donor interventions” (in italics in the original text). We did so reluctantly and only after verifying this information with a range of actors in AP. The three Indian organisations most directly associated with the *Prajateerpu* process endorsed section 5.2 (p. 57-59), along with the rest of the report, prior to its publication.

Report launch and advocacy

The implication that IIED and IDS somehow combined their press release with that issued by ITDG, Christian Aid, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace is incorrect as our institute directors have explained to you. You should therefore refer the rest of your comments in this paragraph to those NGOs -not IIED and IDS. Contrary to the information being circulated by your office, ActionAid India, one of DFID’s major partners in India, has consistently supported the *Prajateerpu* process and has recently reaffirmed its strong endorsement of the *Prajateerpu* report.

Our report merely presents the results of what was widely judged to be a fair and competent participatory process and combines this with a brief sketch of the social and economic context in which the process took place. We have faithfully reproduced the *Prajateerpu* discussions on displacement of farmers and land consolidation. We invite you to read what members of the jury and specialist witnesses had to say about this serious matter in sections 3.1.9 and 3.1.10 of the report. The UK press and NGOs received the full report and used its contents in their own ways. Neither MP (or IIED) nor TW (or IDS) can be held responsible for any errors of interpretation made by these organisations and the media after the official launch of the report in the House of Commons, on 18 March 2002.

The launch of the *Prajateerpu* report in the UK House of Parliament was consistent with the design of a deliberative process that linked local voices on the future of food, farming and rural development with national and international policy making. Some level of advocacy on behalf of the voiceless is implicit in action research on participation. We feel this is no less valid than the advocacy on behalf of expert knowledge that would have been implied by holding the launch at an academic institution. We have tried to go beyond the idea of advocating on behalf of the marginalised to the practice of enabling the *marginalised to speak for themselves*.

Given that one of the jury’s requests was that we help ensure that “aid from white people” both reached and actually benefited them it was entirely appropriate what we made “white people” in the World Bank and DFID part of the focus of the report’s launch. This is why IIED paid for one of the members of the citizens’ jury (Mrs Anjamma) to come from her village in AP in order to present the jury’s verdict in the House of Commons. Given the stated aim of DFID to empower the voices of the poor, we had hoped that Mrs Anjamma would have been given the opportunity to engage in open,

face-to-face, dialogue with DFID representatives. We regret that Clare Short and senior DFID staff declined all our invitations to attend the launch and the chance to meet Mrs Anjamma in the House of Commons.

Attacking government

None of the organisers, analysts or participants in the *Prajateerpu* process aimed to attack the government. Yet on the basis of a few lines of our forty thousand-word report your concluding sentence makes just this slur against those involved in *Prajateerpu*. To repeat, the *Prajateerpu* brought together representatives from the GoAP, the corporate sector, NGOs, university based academics, a former chief judge and a bilateral donor agency (The Netherlands). The Indian journalists and television crews who covered the *Prajateerpu* story in AP and the rest of India are all highly respected professionals. Whilst the jury's verdict clearly rejected Vision 2020's stated plans for food, farming and rural development in AP, in no way can the individuals and organisations associated with *Prajateerpu* be dismissed as simply "attacking the government", nor does anyone else except yourself seem to think so. Unless you can provide evidence we suggest that you might like to withdraw this unfortunate remark.

Despite your statements about democracy in India, it is difficult for senior professionals to openly criticise their government, especially in AP, without jeopardising their careers. We made use of extensive field experience over many years, and of written and oral evidence collected from a variety of stakeholders right up until the beginning of this year. All published evaluations of DFID's work in AP are, to the best of our knowledge, funded by DFID, so are perhaps not the most transparent source of objective information. If it this is not the case, we would be grateful if you could provide us with the relevant references. We are happy to provide you with further information regarding an alternative academic literature on aid in Andhra Pradesh of which you do not seem to be aware.

In closing, we wish to thank you for reacting to the *Prajateerpu* report. Your forceful interventions have helped spark off internal debates within IIED/IDS and beyond about independent research and academic freedom in the face of attempts from a few individuals within a major donor agency to silence critical reflections. There is now a healthy discussion on how and why donors use, reinterpret, or ignore action research that gives a bigger voice to poor and marginalised communities in the policy process.

Yours sincerely

Dr Michel Pimbert, IIED

Dr Tom Wakeford, IDS

Cc: Martin Dinham, Director Asia, DFID
Richard Calvert, Head, Information and Civil Society Department, DFID
Nigel Cross, Director IIED
Keith Bezanson, Director IDS

Annex

E-mail invitations to DFID India and correspondence about *Prajateerpu* are listed in chronological order in summary form. The full text of each message is available with the named DFID-India and APRLP staff.

Message from Michel Pimbert (MP) to Simon Croxton (SC-Senior Rural Livelihoods Advisor, DFID India) on 19 April 2001. Invitation to DFID to participate in *Prajateerpu*, either by nominating a specialist witness or an official observer on the oversight panel.

Response from SC to MP on 20 April 2001, saying that he will consult internally within DFID and then get back to MP

Follow up message from SC to MP on 3 May 2001. No one from DFID can attend/be part of the *Prajateerpu* event. However, SC names 2 DFID staff who might be persuaded to represent DFID on the Oversight Panel (Sarah Montague or DFID AP State representative R.S. Sharat)

MP response to SC on 6 May 2001. MP understands time constraints but renews his invitation for DFID to be formally represented on the panel of independent observers

SC response to MP on 8 May 2001. Gives information about new and higher levels of British Aid to India, and to AP in particular

Message SC to MP on 1 June 2001. Mr SP Tucker from APRLP is presented as a possible DFID representative on the oversight panel

MP message to Mr SP Tucker (SPT) on 7 June 2001, copied to SC. Letter of invitation to Tucker with mention of previous correspondence with DFID India

SPT response to MP on 7 June. Interested in coming along but without the DFID hat

MP message to SC on 19 June 2001. MP sends time table of *Prajateerpu* event, with renewed invitation to SC to take part for at least a day

SC response to MP on 23 June 2001. SC finally says he will not attend the *Prajateerpu* event

DFID representative in Hyderdabad responds to MP on 21 June 2001. R.S. Sharat declines invitation to officially represent DFID on the independent Oversight Panel at *Prajateerpu*.

With each invitation sent to DFID and APRLP staff MP attached a background explanatory note on the citizen jury/scenario workshop on food and farming futures in AP (objectives, methodology, role of specialist witness and oversight panel, involvement of media as part of the design process). This was to make the process as transparent as possible and also highlight the potential policy /media impacts of *Prajateerpu* to DFID.