

DFID's 'Strong Arm Tactics' Denounced

- by K Rama Rayalu, Times News Network, Hyderabad - July 30, 2002

The controversy over the 'Prajateerpu' [citizens' jury] verdict against the government's V2020 document, which proposed to reduce the number of people dependent on land from 70 percent to 40 percent, is still raging, with several NGOs decrying the 'strong arm tactics' of the Department for International Development [DFID], the funding agency.

The Gramya Resource Center for Women member Dr V Rukmini Rao, one of the witnesses to the 'Prajateerpu', in a letter to Minister (Development) and Head, DFID India, Robert Graham Harrison on July 22, called the DFID's response to the Prajateerpu report as "extremely undemocratic". She accused the DFID of "seeking to remove the report from the public domain" and said that it amount to "bullying and arm-twisting".

The Prajateerpu was facilitated by the IIED and IDS, both renowned research institutions, based in the UK.

Incidentally, a copy of Robert Graham Harrison's letter written to the IIED Executive Director Nigel Cross, available with the Times of India, states: "We [DFID] note that the Prajateerpu report is still on your internet site, perpetuating allegations about DFID's working style and lack of participation. I request you that this material is removed".

It may be recalled that the Prajateerpu, held between June 25 and July 1, 2001, in Algole village of Medak, had opposed the reduction of those eking out a livelihood out of land from 70 percent to 40 percent, land consolidation and displacement of the rural poor, contract farming, genetically modified crops, Bt Cotton, and labour displacing mechanisation. In a related development, the AP Coalition in Defence of Diversity [APCID], a network of 142 civil society groups actively involved in the Prajateerpu process, in a letter to the IDS and IIED directors Keith A Bezanson and Nigel Cross on July 27th, condemned the DFID's role in the episode as 'most despicable'.

The AP Coalition in Defence of Diversity appealed to the institutions to put the report back on the website and honour the researchers involved in publishing the report.