

DFID Research Strategy 2008-2013 – Consultation Exercise – Africa

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Submitted by: D Romney¹, N Jones³, P Kibwika⁴, M Nassuna⁴, P Okori⁴, N Efa², G Legesse⁶, D Oyewole⁵, B Ololade⁵, K Uwaibi⁵, A Ademeyo⁵, J Asaba¹, N Chowdhury³

¹ **CABI Africa**, ICRAF Complex, United Nations Avenue, Gigiri, PO Box 633-00621, Nairobi, Kenya

² **CABI Africa**, c/o Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, C/T/S/D Department, P.O. Box 62347, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

³ **ODI** (Overseas Development Institute), 111 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE17JD, United Kingdom

⁴ **PICO-Uganda** (People, Innovation and Change in Organisations) PO Box 16485, Kampala-Wandegeya, Uganda

⁵ **CAPPS** (Centre for African Policy & Peace Strategy) Africa office, 3 Abiola Segun Ajayi Street, Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria

Executive Summary

This report synthesises the findings from the Africa consultation process designed to inform the DFID Central Research Department's development of a new five year research strategy from 2008-2013. It provides an overview of the views of researchers and research users about priority research themes and research processes from Uganda, Nigeria and Ethiopia gathered during in-country consultations in Oct-Nov 2007.

The study included the following methodological approaches: joint development of research methods and instruments by the study team, key informant interviews and focus group discussions, in-country workshops, a quantitative survey electronic survey, a background literature review on bridging research, policy and practice in Africa, and a final study team meeting to discuss cross-country similarities and differences.

The objectives of the study were to solicit feedback on i) the relevance of DFID's four research priority areas in diverse African country contexts – killer diseases, sustainable agriculture, governance and social development, and climate change – as well as emerging thematic concerns of growth and education, and ii) how DFID could better support research and research into use processes. The latter set of questions focused on research demand, capacity building, partnerships and research into use approaches.

Overall the consultation highlighted the importance of ensuring that research funding supports context-sensitive research questions and research processes. Global research is important, but to be meaningful and useable in national contexts specific research questions must be informed by local understandings and priorities, and involve multiple stakeholders at all stages of the research process, from agenda setting, to research implementation through to research communication. Importantly, while DFID's broad research themes resonated with national priorities to a reasonable degree, there was very strong demand for approaching research and research into use processes in a fundamentally different way, including working with a broader array of sub-national policy and civil society actors. More specific findings and recommendations that emerged from the consultation process included the following:

Agriculture and Economic Growth: There was strong interest in increased investment in research on agriculture and especially broader linkages to economic growth from all three countries. In order to increase the uptake of research findings farmers and agricultural extension workers needed to be better supported to articulate demand and to become involved in action research activities. This would also facilitate better integration of scientific and indigenous forms of knowledge in the field.

Climate Change: Climate change was seen as important but not necessarily of primary importance. There was a sense that this was still very much a northern-driven agenda and research was needed to demonstrate local impacts of climate change and to raise awareness of its importance, including disaster risk reduction approaches. Research could also play an important role in documenting adaptation strategies. Overall respondents recommended that climate change should be seen as one part of a broader research agenda on environmental issues.

Governance: Governance was highlighted as a critical issue in all three countries and seen as a critical underpinning of effective development as a dearth of good governance was responsible for many of the challenges in other sectors. There was a particular interest in

understanding approaches that would be appropriate to African contexts, and much less interest in international drivers of change, security and geo-politics. Issues around decentralization, the gendered and age dimensions of governance, civil society and participation and joined up government were seen as particularly important research priorities.

Health: DFID's four main health priorities of a) communicable diseases (esp TB, HIV/AIDS, malaria), b) maternal and child health, c) health systems and d) non-communicable diseases are broadly in line with country priorities. But more than in other areas, there was as much concern about the communication and uptake of research findings as the content, and for strengthening the policy relevance of health research.

Education: Education emerged as a cross-cutting theme in a number of the thematic/sectoral discussions. There was a particular emphasis on the links between education and good governance, on improving education quality, addressing gender barriers to education and responding to demand for non-formal education.

Priority Setting: The dearth of mechanisms to articulate and channel demand for knowledge was emphasised in all countries, and the problems of knowledge fragmentation, weak coordination and limited public access underscored. There was an impassioned call for greater involvement of end users throughout the research process, as there was a strong sense that most research is currently largely supply and often donor-driven. An equally robust demand emerged for research that was problem-oriented, policy-relevant and in line with broader development and grassroots priorities.

Partnership: Partnerships were seen as important mechanisms for improving research quality and also research-policy-practice linkages. There was strong support for North/South partnerships, as these were seen to have the advantage of capacity building, technical expertise, funding, creating synergies, and international exposure. However, the rules of the game had to be improved in such partnerships, and be premised on mutual trust and respect, greater equality and voice/forthrightness for Southern partners, and opportunities for joint decision-making about project conceptualisation, implementation, including the production of joint outputs.

Communication: Our country consultations suggested that communication had to be viewed as an integral part of research/ knowledge generation processes, and as such needed to be adequately resourced and not added an after-thought. The most effective mechanisms for communicating research findings entail joined up approaches, involving multiple stakeholders throughout the research process, a combination of face-to-face interactions and the dissemination of user-friendly materials that emphasise the messages of the research.

Capacity building: There was considerable interest in support for strengthening the capacities of researchers as well as civil society and policy actor research end users. Capacity building needs were identified at the individual, institutional and system/enabling environment levels, but above all it needed to be strategic, systematic and sustainable. It should also go beyond short or long training course and be embedded within broader development projects so as to ensure relevance. Favoured approaches included peer-to-peer learning, mentoring, coaching and on the job training.