

Open Data for Agriculture: Encouraging greater data sharing in areas relevant to sustainable global food production.

Briefing for Ian Boyd regarding engagement with G8 open data initiative

1. At the 2012 G8 Summit leaders committed to the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, the next phase of a shared commitment to achieving global food security.
2. As part of this commitment the G8 agreed to “Share relevant agricultural data available from G-8 countries with African partners and convene an international conference on Open Data for Agriculture, to develop options for the establishment of a global platform to make reliable agricultural and related information available to African farmers, researchers and policymakers, taking into account existing agricultural data systems”.
3. At the 8th April conference, the US will be looking for firm commitments from individual countries on making data available. They will be inviting you to attend.

Recommendation

4. The current scope of the G8 open data initiative is relatively unclear. We recommend that you maintain interest and remain supportive but continue to allow DfID to lead.

Overview

5. Within Government, DfID lead this initiative, but some of the data and modelling initiatives are shared with or owned by Defra
6. The UK believes (evidence from UK Food Security Assessment) that UK and global food security is best achieved through open, transparent and better functioning global markets, along with an improvement in the underlying productivity of agriculture.
7. The G20 supports this through the Agricultural Markets Information System (AMIS), which aims to improve agricultural market transparency and data around the world food situation.
8. The open data initiative and wider work of the G8 and New Alliance¹ will play a role in supporting these wider themes.
9. However, at the current stage it is not clear as what is meant by ‘data-sharing’ in terms of the precise data outputs that would be most helpful in meeting G8 objectives. Until the proposals are further developed it is difficult to judge how much involvement Defra should have.

¹ The aims of the New Alliance initiative on food security is given in the annex.

10. It will be important as to whether these open data initiatives cover all forms of data or are more focussed on scientific/biological data. In terms of food security, the sharing of data on the following could be extremely beneficial:
- Quantities of agricultural inputs and outputs
 - Prices, incomes, stock levels
 - Productivity growth
 - Weather and disease impacts (e.g. mapping)
11. Still, whilst Defra hold some data in this area, much is already shared via the EU and AMIS. Much is also held outside the department (e.g., in Research Council – funded institutes and universities). Key therefore to success will be looking across the data landscape funded by Government to see what needs to be done to make this more available.

Benefits of engaging with G8 countries on data-sharing:

a. practical benefits for African Nations

12. DfID have some concerns that the open-data initiative is not yet specific enough on meeting the data needs of the African nations. At the moment much of the discussion has been on the sharing of scientific (such as genomic) data held by academic and research institutions. Whilst in itself this is a useful exercise, it is not clear whether this data is the sort of data which African policy-makers most require in making food security decisions.
13. It is not obvious that African nations have sufficient institutional capacity to make use of some forms of scientific data.

b. practical benefits for the UK

14. Data-sharing could allow UK access to data and models held in other countries without the need to invest extra money and resources here in UK.
15. Good practice might be represented by advanced models held by others; for example, on water-use efficiency where we are still at a primordial stage. There is therefore likely to be some spill-over benefits for the UK, at least for the academic community.
16. The UK has excellent data in some fields, for example regarding global satellite data, and we could make a valuable contribution in specific areas.
17. Prices and costs comparisons with our models and those from G8 countries will help us appreciate value for money and understand any outliers.

c. Costs to participants

18. The collection and dissemination of data will come at a cost which is likely to be significantly higher in developing countries.

Consequences of not engaging:

19. Defra is most able to add-value as facilitating interchange of data between projects that have been funded across Government. To note, we publish all of our research reports and therefore they are freely available, but the data remains often with the researchers – and there may be more we could do to encourage greater sharing.

20. Given this facilitator role, not engaging heavily with this initiative is likely to have some impact on its success. However, such a concern should not be overplayed as Defra is only able to share data that we hold ourselves. Broad support for the initiative is probably sufficient.

Annex

Along with other G8 members, the UK is supporting the New Alliance for Food and Nutrition Security, an initiative announced at this year's G8 Summit at Camp David in the US.

The New Alliance² aims to improve food security, farming and agribusiness across Africa in order to help pull 50 million people out of chronic poverty over the next 10 years through agriculture sector growth. G8 nations, African countries, aid agencies and 45 leading multinational and African companies committed to supporting the new alliance, which will focus initially in a small number of countries but expand overtime to be a continent wide initiative for sub-Saharan Africa.

The UK has taken on Presidency of the G8 through 2013, will be hosting the G8 summit in the summer. Before that the PM will host a food event on 6 June (DFID lead). We are not sure exactly what this will discuss but the focus is likely to be on hunger and nutrition in developing countries.

The New Alliance for Food and Nutrition Security will:

- Provide support for investment climate reforms which encourage agricultural sector growth
 - Help more farmers access markets by, for example, linking smallholder farmers to markets through investment in rural roads
 - Extend insurance services to smallholder farmers to help protect them from future droughts, crop failures or other catastrophes
 - Stimulate private sector investment in agriculture
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- Increase access to innovative technology for smallholder farmers
- Finally, 45 leading companies will invest over \$3 billion to develop agriculture in Africa and will sign up to a new code of responsible investment.

The UK contribution to the New Alliance will include support to the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP). The GAFSP programme was established by G8 members and others to help ensure that the commitments made on food security at the L'Aquila Summit in 2009 are delivered in an efficient and cost-effective manner.