

White Paper response

CAFOD broadly welcomes the DFID White Paper “Eliminating World Poverty: Making Governance Work for the Poor”.

One year after the Gleneagles G8 meeting where – apart from trade justice – the emphasis of Make Poverty History was on the quantity of resources, attention is now swinging to the quality of those resources, to the factors that can ensure that they will be well used and have the desired outcomes in terms of poverty reduction and development. The White Paper is a comprehensive survey of the factors that keep people in poverty and 180 action points with which the UK aims to tackle them.

The White Paper, as its title suggests, acknowledges the enormous importance of competent and honest government and commitment to poverty reduction in developing countries and sets out a set of policy instruments both to encourage good governance and to deter dishonesty and corruption.

CAFOD welcomes the inclusion of climate change as a major area for investment and advocacy and the acknowledgement that climate change is the most serious long term threat to development.

There are commendable commitments about UK aid, in particular the intention to set up a “£100 million Governance and Transparency Fund to strengthen civil society and the media to help citizens hold their governments to account”. In its submission to the White Paper consultation CAFOD asked for support to civil society precisely for this purpose. CAFOD is also pleased that there are commitments to act on the supply side of corruption by implementing the recommendations of the Africa All Party Group’s report “The Other Side of the Coin”.

CAFOD also asked that the UK invest more in social protection – regular payments to poor people in the form of old age pensions or child allowances or special targeted poverty payments. The White Paper commits DFID to “significantly increasing spending on social protection in ten countries in Africa and Asia by 2009”. Pilot programmes have shown that poor people, especially older people, spend this money wisely, and in Africa, where older people find themselves caring for their grandchildren as a consequence of HIV and AIDS, they often use it to improve nutrition or send the children to school.

CAFOD also welcomes the commitment to double spending on development education, an acknowledgement that informed support for development is vital if the UK is to continue to play a leading role in the international development community.

In essence, however, the White Paper is an advocacy agenda, committing the UK – and DFID in particular – to work with international agencies, other donors, developing countries, the private sector and civil society to achieve joint objectives. Over 100 of the White Paper’s 180 action points involve engagement with others and often persuasion of others to adopt particular policies. This is an explicit and practical recognition that development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals can come about only as a result of international cooperation and agreement. It is a hugely ambitious agenda and CAFOD questions whether DFID, already subject to staff cuts, will be able to deliver effectively on the majority of these action points. DFID is currently cutting staff numbers both in the UK and overseas as required by the Treasury’s 2005-2008 Comprehensive Spending Review and will

have to implement the White Paper with at best static staff numbers or possibly, if the next year's Comprehensive Spending Review asks for further cuts, an even smaller staff.