

**DFID – E-Forum  
New Directions for Agriculture in Reducing Poverty**

**PUBLIC POLICY AND EXPENDITURE:**

**Moderator Team:** Stephen Akroyd

**Synthesis of key outputs**

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## **Objective and Key Questions**

**The consultation aims to seek views, opinions and examples of innovative and established practice in order to inform future DFID policy and investment. Your moderator will lead the debate with the short introductory paper below, provide regular summaries and guide the dialogue.**

### **Key Questions Asked:**

**How can DFID help to make public policy and expenditure work for the poor?**

### **Theme Outline – prepared by Stephen Akroyd, 30 March 2004**

There is an urgent need to identify how public policy and expenditure on agriculture can be made more effective in achieving poverty reduction. The arguments are compelling: (i) the majority of the world's poor reside in rural areas; (ii) agriculture accounts for a major part of developing countries' economies; and (iii) growth in agriculture has important linkages with the rest of the economy.

Yet despite the importance of agriculture, little is being done to ensure that the sector plays its role in poverty reduction. In many developing countries, government policy on agriculture is unclear and public spending in the sector is stagnant or declining. The problem is especially acute in sub-Saharan Africa, where there has been rapid withdrawal of state and donor support to agriculture, fuelled by a perception (probably correct) that past public spending to agriculture has had little impact.

Why is this a problem? Although agricultural production is predominantly a private sector activity, public investment is required to ensure that market mechanisms operate effectively. There are also important public goods in agriculture for which public funding (though not necessarily public provision) is required. There is some evidence to support this, which shows positive growth and poverty reduction effects from public spending on agriculture - mainly on production-enhancing investments such as agricultural research.

However, it is not just a question of throwing money at agriculture. This has been tried before, and has failed. New approaches are needed which:

- Identify the linkages between agriculture and poverty reduction;
- Establish a clear policy and institutional framework for effective public spending in agriculture - ideally one that maximises poverty impact;
- Recognise the need to demonstrate the poverty impact of public spending in agriculture, compared with spending in other sectors (e.g. health and education); and,

- Enable approaches to pro-poor agricultural spending that are flexible and responsive to specific regional and country needs.

### **Agricultural policy reform - issues**

A traditional focus of ministries of agriculture has been upon food production and self-sufficiency, often associated with significant state involvement in agricultural production and marketing. Over recent years, reappraisal of the role of government has encouraged a withdrawal of the state from commercial agriculture, towards a role focussed towards support to making rural markets work, and the provision of basic rural services that the private sector cannot provide.

The process has not been straightforward. Reforms have often been partial, and sometimes reversed, creating policy uncertainty and undermining the overall impetus for reform. There are few success stories.

Key questions:

- What impact have recent policy reforms in agriculture had upon poverty reduction? How have the reforms affected different groups – for example producers of export / cash crops compared to producers of food / subsistence crops? Has the poverty impact of policy reforms differed between countries; and if so, why?
- The nature of rural economies can be diverse, both between countries and geographically within countries (high potential vs low potential areas). How can DFID and governments adequately reflect the need for differentiated policies, and roles for state and market across areas?
- What priority investments and further policy reforms should DFID be promoting to support pro-poor agricultural growth (including in areas of non-agriculture spending, such as rural infrastructure)?
- How should distributional issues be addressed - through free or subsidised services to target groups, or are alternative forms of support more effective?
- How effective have efforts been to increase beneficiary participation in agriculture policy processes? What can DFID do to enhance participation?
- Many countries are moving towards systems of decentralised service delivery. What does this imply for the provision of pro-poor agricultural services?

### **Public expenditure management in agriculture - issues**

While agricultural policy reforms often imply a changed role for government, they do not necessarily reduce the case for public spending on agriculture. It is important to note however, that: (i) the composition and management of public spending to agriculture is more important than the overall level of spending; and (ii) ministries of agriculture need to demonstrate effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery in order to make a convincing claim for scarce public resources. However, in many developing countries, assessing the composition, relevance, efficiency and impact of developing country spending to agriculture (and to other

sectors) is made difficult by weak public expenditure management and accountability systems.

The move towards decentralisation of rural services adds a further complication to public expenditure management in agriculture, requiring careful planning to determine responsibilities for resource allocation and accountability.

Key questions:

- Should we be concerned about declining public spending to agriculture? Why, and what actions should DFID take?
- Sound expenditure management is critical for achieving policy objectives. What approaches and instruments should DFID use to encourage improved public expenditure management in agriculture?
- The literature typically identifies three principles of pro-poor budgeting - participation, transparency and accountability. How can these principles be applied to public spending in agriculture?
- Is government effectively able to implement and monitor agricultural policy through the budget process? What are the typical problems, and how can DFID assist governments in resolving them?
- What can be concluded about the efficiency of public spending in agriculture: (i) at the sector / organisational level (ministries of agriculture and their agencies), and (ii) at the local level under decentralised service delivery?
- Co-ordination of expenditures between ministries, and between central and local government, is becoming increasingly important for achieving rural poverty reduction. How can DFID support this process?

## **Welcome Message from Stephen Akroyd – 30 March 2004**

Firstly, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all the participants in this e-consultation who have taken the time to register and participate in what we sincerely hope will be a productive and successful discussion on the role of public policy and expenditure in agriculture and its implications for growth and poverty reduction.

Agriculture has traditionally been a key sector of state involvement but in recent years the trend shows a reduction in the provision and support of agricultural production and marketing and a shift of focus to rural markets operations and basic services provision. Key areas for discussion in the next few weeks hence hope to examine the two core areas of agricultural policy reforms and the efficiency and management of public expenditure. With regard to agricultural policy, as well as identifying the impact of recent agricultural policy reforms, we hope the discussion will give impetus to the issues surrounding how best DFID can address and prioritise policy reforms and address the vast differentials that exist between rural economies. Additionally, we hope to address distributional issues, the role of subsidies, participation processes, and the effect of decentralization in service delivery.

The discussion involving public expenditure hopes to focus on the critical roles of management and co-ordination in public expenditure. Weak systems of public expenditure management and accountability hinder delivery of services by agricultural ministries. Can decentralization be the solution in making resource allocation more efficient and increasing accountability? DFID identifies that effective expenditure management is imperative to accomplishing policy objectives and there is the need to build within this framework participation, transparency and accountability. We hope that this discussion will incorporate these key questions into our debate as well as raise new ones on the future of public policy and expenditure in agriculture and its implications for growth and poverty reduction. Whilst some of the above points may just be the starting points for discussion, we may find that other topics and ideas may evolve into much longer debates. This site will hope to draw upon your ideas, thoughts and discussions and to then draw to some conclusion on the forthcoming role of DFID in agriculture. We hope to host a lively discussion and I look forward to your comments and contributions.

## **Summary – 26 April 2004**

Dear all,

We have been disappointed by the lack of response so far in the public policy and expenditure section of this debate as we should like to have a lively discussion based on the questions raised by the theme outline, welcome message and more recently the note posted by Andrew Dorward.

Would the contributors like more guidance in this discussion? Would you like to focus more specifically on certain areas regarding issues (and if so where would this focus lie?) or perhaps keep the discussion more broad-based? It is only through your feedback that we can begin stimulating a lively debate on the issues surrounding public policy and expenditure and influence the future DFID agriculture policy in this area.

We hope that we will begin receiving more input from our contributors perhaps starting with the questions that Andrew Dorward raised on the need for reform of budgetary support to agriculture. Should policy be more geared towards project based work and if so what type of framework is necessary to ensure success at management and implementation levels? Are there any examples that can be provided to demonstrate the particular successes or failures of past projects and if so what were the project characteristics that led to these outcomes?

We look forward to seeing more contributions this week so that we can get the ball rolling and ensure a lively debate and a worthwhile learning process for all involved.

Kind Regards

## Summary, 30 April 2004

Dear participant,

This is our first weekly summary and although we had an initial slow start to the discussions, the comments have picked up considerably this week and we have had a majority of issues raised which I hope will give further impetus to our discussion in the coming weeks.

Andrew Dorward began with the role of budgetary support in agriculture. The 70s and 80s saw several large-scale projects whose failures were due to problems with management, implementation as well as failures to address macro-economic and sectoral constraints. Andrew therefore posed the question of whether budgetary support is integral to agriculture or does DFID need to put greater emphasis on project orientated work?

Michael Wales (FAO) commented that direct budget support (DBS) often leads to displacement of funds which may have been earmarked for investment projects and whilst DBS restricted potential interference in the affairs of sovereign states, it also reduced donor responsibility in reducing poverty. The increasing trend for adopting DBS has reduced the scope for money being put aside for investments and meant resource decisions are largely left to the Ministries of Agriculture. MoA's are focused upon meeting production intensive targets which means that they have 'little sympathy with the current preoccupation with poverty reduction.' MoA's thus lacked the capacity to secure sufficient funds from the Ministry of Finance. Thus the lack of earmarking and setting aside of resources for agricultural investments may severely hamper growth prospects-how is DFID and other donors to operate in this new environment?

Jock Campbell (IMM-Exeter University) placed much emphasis in the policy making cycle and its need to be more pro-poor. This would of course require the necessary capacity building to enable the poor to participate in the policy process and furthermore follow this through to the policy implementation stages. A process that excludes the poor in policy-making will lack relevance to the poor.

Brian Cooksey of TADREG in Tanzania brought up several points that could lead to further discussions. He pointed out the lack of support within Tanzania for export crop liberalisation and even the reversal of the effects of previously implemented policies that supported this. State investment continues to be focused on stand alone infrastructure projects and fails to provide an environment that can foster institutional changes to make export agriculture a dynamic, pro-poor growth sector. He poses the question, "What is your solution to the anti-market politics?"

The final comment this week from Colin Poulton (Imperial College) commented on Michael's earlier contribution on the weaknesses of MoA's to secure finance from Ministries of Finance. Poulton emphasised the need to thoroughly reform the MoA's. Furthermore he states that there is a key role for MoA in promoting agricultural growth especially in the role of intensified small-holder agricultural production which may become a key driver of rural economic growth. He suggests decisions need to be made with respect to the roles of private and public service role in the provision of inputs, technical advice and access to finance.

Possible area for further consideration:

- The decentralisation of agricultural/rural development planning.
- Reforming the MoA's-greater accountability mechanisms?
- The need for local level development planning that is consistent with a broader national agricultural strategy.

Thank you for the contributions made so far. We strongly suggest that you visit the archive discussions page regularly to access the full version of comments posted on <http://dfid-agriculture-consultation.nri.org/maillists/public-policy-and-expenditure/maillist.html>

Also please note as posted on the opening page of the website, the consultation process has now been extended to 28th May.

We look forward to the discussions gaining greater momentum this week and anticipate another week of diverse and lively comments. Please feel free to add, comment further or introduce new topics as well as focus upon specific areas where you would like further discussion.

Regards

## Summary from Stephen Akroyd, 17 May 2004

Dear participants,

Firstly thank you for your continued contributions which have not only added to the existing themes of this debate so far but have seen some new ideas emerging from our discussions. Ruchi Tripathi from Action Aid has added considerable volume to our contributions this week with specific examples of Action Aid and its influence on the public policy and expenditure arena in its countries of operation. Please remember all contributions can be read in full by visiting the archives page which is located at: <http://dfid-agriculture-consultation.nri.org/maillists/public-policy-and-expenditure/maillist.html>

We have just two weeks left for this e-forum so I would like to encourage continued input from all our past contributors and especially welcome any new contributions made by late entrants or by those who have yet to share their experiences and insights

The emerging themes evident so far are:

- Projects VS Direct Budget Support (DBS)
- Political Economy Approach and the Political Dimension
- Shaping Public Policy and Widening Participation
- Shaping DFID Policy- The need for Coherence and Accountability

The emerging themes from the discussions and contributions so far are as follows:

Projects VS Direct Budget Support (DBS)

Michael Wales commented on the increasing trend to adopting Direct Budget Support (DBS) which has consequently led to the displacement of funds previously earmarked for agriculture investment projects and added that this led to the donors dodging their responsibility in implementing effective strategies to reduce poverty. It also led to a shift in decision-making processes and resource allocations as the Ministries of Agriculture were incapable of securing sufficient funds from the Ministries of Finance. Adoption of DBS has led to the loss of earmarking investments within the development budget. As Ministries of Finance are left to resource allocation a widening gap becomes evident as MoA's are unable to secure funds and this hinted at a much larger task of thinking up ways to reform Ministries of Agriculture.

Added to this were Ana Riviere-Cinnamond's comments on livestock and the requirement for a pro-poor focus to funding livestock services. Whilst the need to place health and education at the top of the priority lists, financial resources allocated to development of agriculture remains crucial. Given the increasing trends in livestock production there is need to homogenise standards and ensure effective and efficient approaches to managing livestock. This will require sustained funding, Ana reiterated the views of Colin Poulton and Michael Wales in that the Ministries of Agriculture must increase their bargaining power if they are to secure resources. Whilst the livestock sector may occupy a lower place in the list of priorities, it is nonetheless becoming a formidable area of growth in the agricultural sector and its sustained growth requires the securing of funds. However there is a need to recognise that resource generation alone cannot be equated with improved effectiveness and efficiency.

## Political Economy Approach and the Political Dimension

Brian Cooksey and Jonathon Poulter continued with their themes of political ideologies placing a burden on the effectiveness of instruments as governments succumbed to pressures of disbursement and the need to keep the local government and bureaucracy on side. Jonathan Coulter questions the setting of targets as a viable means to achieving poverty reduction and even raises questions on the recruitment for development staff, suggesting a shift away from the hiring of academic high flyers to staff with practical ground experience.

Brian Cooksey suggests renewed discussion of the political dimension of small-holder farming to which politics and ideology are pivotal in determining the policy and reform themes. Colin Poulton's earlier comments on the need to reform Ministries of Agriculture to play a more central role in resource allocation provided grounding to Brian Cooksey's comments on Tanzania where there has been a steady backlash to liberalisation in export agriculture. The 'politics of ownership' (Stefano Ponte) comes into play as the international investors and multinationals take the place of state-owned banks and co-operative unions fuelling the case for more state intervention and less liberalisation in Tanzania. Perhaps provides some food for thought for the pro-globalisation amongst us? Invariably it seems that as long as the major donors serve to empower the bureaucrats and politicians and provide few incentives to the farmers and investors, money will continue to fill up that 'proverbial bottomless pit.' Brian calls therefore for a DFID approach that is not stand-alone and follows coherence through its programmes. Furthermore he emphasises the role of the state in correcting market-failures which may be more productive than basket funding of agricultural sector programmes and finally to not underestimate the role of the private sector in development.

## Shaping Public Policy and Widening Participation

Jock Campbell emphasised the need for a pro-poor policy process, however this would require capacity building and the necessary instruments to be in place for the poor to actively participate. Ruchi Tripathi from Action Aid built on this further by outlining some of the ways Action Aid has widened participation and shaped public policy. She provided an example of the Citizen Juries in India and Brazil are effective in enabling poor farmers to actively participate in debating policy issues of which the results are then passed onto local/state governments. Other forms of participation encouraged by Action Aid are participatory video diaries and participatory assessments. The theme that emerges as a result is the need for governments to recognise that civil society organisations can offer policy solutions in addition to their traditional role as implementers. There is little use for encouraging the participation of marginal groups however, if little is done to translate these inputs into effective policies.

## Shaping DFID Policy- The need for Coherence and Accountability

Andy Bullock raised the issue of hunger in the context of the Public Service Agreement (PSA). The PSA exerts authority on aid management instruments as well as DFID policy making over the next 2.5 years. The PSA states as a primary objective the eradication of poverty and extreme hunger in developing countries through achieving the MDGs by 2015. However as Andy Bullock stated, the PSA has no mention of the elimination of hunger anywhere else in the document, hence whilst it looks to hold as much importance as poverty eradication, it has been given no priority in the DFID medium-term strategy and nor does it hold weight in DFID's mandated business. Furthermore the word 'agriculture' is also

excluded from the PSA and its relevance in alleviating poverty and affecting key indicators is only implied indirectly. The entry points for agriculture and food in the PSA document are indirect at best, the PSA supports the G8 Action Plan for Africa, yet fails to recognise NEPAD views of agricultural revitalisation being pivotal to the continent's revival and prosperity. Andy therefore calls for greater coherence, recognition, commitment and a shift towards a more balanced twin track approach in DFID's public policy and expenditure?

Ruchi Tripathi's contribution highlighted the need for DFID to ensure its policy reached the poorest of the poor and that the policy took into account gender implications i.e. formulating public policy in agriculture that support the endeavours of women farmers. The need for government accountability is central in establishing and sustaining policy measures and as Ruchi exemplified through Action Aid India. Their involvement with the Supreme Court of India ensured that the court ordered the Indian government to implement the Public Distribution System that ensures meals for school children in addition to the set up of a monitoring mechanism by the court to ensure the sustaining of this system. In addition the participatory budget analysis is an effective tool in improving governance, and in holding governments more accountable for their actions. The budget is a critical entry point for numerous issues and can encourage widespread policy dialogues that may subsequently favour and encourage grass roots ownership to the traditional top-down approach.

That's it for now and I look forward to your further contributions next week either adding to the above themes or exploring new areas of thought. However to move the discussion forward we need to begin to look more specifically to DFID's role in policy making given the above constraints and what need to change if DFID is to succeed working in this given environment.

## **Overall Summary prepared by Stephen Akroyd, 2 June 2004**

This summary sets out the principal issues raised by contributors according to the following main themes:

- Direct Budget Support (DBS) - implications for agriculture
- Reforming ministries of agriculture
- Political economy for change
- Shaping public policy on agriculture and widening participation
- Shaping future DFID policy

### **Direct Budget Support (DBS) - implications for agriculture**

A number of contributions were received raising concerns over the increasing trend for donors to move towards DBS, and the negative consequences that this poses for agriculture.

The concern is that the shift towards DBS results in a diversion of public funds that otherwise would have been allocated to agriculture. Contributors felt that while DBS strengthens ownership by recipient governments over resource allocation decisions, it distances donors from their responsibilities in implementing effective strategies to reduce poverty. This issue is especially relevant to DFID, as DFID is one of the leading bilateral donors promoting DBS as an aid instrument.

DBS inevitably results in a shift in decision-making processes and resource allocations that work against ministries of agriculture. Ministries of agriculture are often one of the weakest sector ministries and the least capable of making a convincing case to central finance ministries for scarce budget resources. Also, many ministries of agriculture maintain a production-oriented view of their role - a view that is inconsistent with the current emphasis upon poverty reduction.

Overall, the adoption of DBS has reduced investments specifically targeted towards agriculture. Without targeting resources to agriculture it is difficult to ensure that the sector receives the resources needed to stimulate growth. It is also makes it difficult for donors to provide effective technical support to ministries of agriculture to target poverty reduction. Technical assistance previously 'bundled' with agriculture sector investment projects is hard to target in isolation.

Whilst spending in sectors such as health and education is a priority, financial resources allocated to the development of agriculture remains crucial for growth and poverty reduction. In this regard the livestock sub-sector was highlighted as an important area for pro-poor growth where sustained public funding is required.

Ultimately however, securing increased public funding for agriculture requires a strengthening of the bargaining power of ministries of agriculture. This points towards political economy considerations and reform of ministries of agriculture.

## **Reforming ministries of agriculture**

The weakness of ministries of agriculture, particularly in Africa, is seen as an obstacle to agriculture fulfilling its potential as a driver for growth and poverty reduction. As already noted, in many countries ministries of agriculture remain production-oriented, with little consideration for poverty. This makes it difficult for them to justify increased public funding to the sector.

Contributors suggested that reforms are needed in a number of areas:

- Capacity building to ensure that key strategic documents (PRSPs etc) accurately reflect the role of agriculture in growth and poverty reduction;
- Increased attention to the provision of public-funded services that are targeted towards the needs of smallholders;
- Adoption of innovative approaches to service delivery, involving closer interaction between public and private service providers;
- Restructuring of ministries of agriculture to reflect decentralisation processes and the need to respond to locally identified priorities; and,
- The need for governments and donors to demand greater accountability from ministries of agriculture.

One contributor posed a question as to whether it was realistic to expect hierarchic ministries of agriculture, mostly starved for funds, to be transformed into delivering services demanded by the poorer factions within communities. Perhaps a faster track in empowering deprived rural communities would be through support to local government, or through community organisations and NGOs.

## **Political economy for change**

A number of contributors highlighted the importance of politics and ideology in determining government and donor approaches to agriculture. An important aspect here is the need for donors to be realistic when it comes to setting targets for poverty reduction in other countries. The principal responsibility for poverty reduction rests with the people and governments of developing countries and we cannot set meaningful targets for what they will do.

A number of points were raised:

- Renewed discussion is needed of the political dimensions of smallholder farming as the driver for rural poverty reduction.
- Liberalisation of agriculture has yielded few positive results. One contributor commented that in Tanzania there is little political demand for more liberalisation (of export agriculture), but there is a need for increased state intervention to correct for instances of 'market failure' - the trouble is that much current state intervention exacerbates rather than attenuates market failure (through patronage, inefficiency, and corruption).
- Pressures of disbursement and the need to keep the local government and bureaucracy 'on side' often compromise the effectiveness and sustainability of donor support to agriculture.
- Diverse, ad hoc, and uncoordinated donor interventions to agriculture continue to be part of the problem.

- Donors need to focus much more on encouraging reform in institutions and tax regimes that improve the environment for private sector investment in agriculture.
- In relation to UK contributions to multilateral agencies involved in agriculture, DFID should: (i) seek to maximise the value of contributions; and (ii) encourage these agencies to shift away from the hiring of academic high flyers to staff with practical experience.

### **Shaping public policy on agriculture and widening participation**

We need to be more effective in engaging the poor in the policy process, and more systematic in the way that policy research is disseminated and used. The mechanisms to allow effective participation by the poor in all stages of the policy process, whilst well known, are rarely used effectively. Even when policy research is relevant to the needs of the poor, it rarely informs policy design and implementation.

A number of contributors highlighted approaches that have proved effective in widening participation by the poor in the debate on agricultural policy. For example 'citizen juries' in India and Brazil have enabled poor farmers to actively participate in debating policy issues and shaping sector interventions by local and state governments. Other forms of participation that have been successful include participatory video diaries and participatory assessments. These examples show that civil society organisations can offer policy solutions in addition to their traditional role as implementers.

The need for government accountability is central in establishing and sustaining policy measures. Experience from India shows that participatory budget analysis can be an effective tool in improving governance, and in holding governments more accountable for their actions. The budget is a critical entry point for numerous issues and can encourage widespread and constructive dialogue, and local ownership of policy processes.

One contributor highlighted the need to consider poor farmers when considering market liberalisation and the reform of rural serviced delivery. Such reforms are often regarded as providing a mechanism for poverty reduction, yet the rural poor are rarely able to respond to market change with the speed and innovation of better-off farmers. It is important that reforms are inclusive of the poor and support is targeted to enable the poor to take advantage of new opportunities.

### **Shaping future DFID policy**

Many of the contributors made suggestions on shaping future DFID policy on agriculture policy. The main proposals are as follows:

- DFID should encourage open and inclusive policy debate about the role of agriculture (especially smallholder agriculture) in economic growth and poverty reduction. The debate should be evidence-based and focussed around an understanding of the political economy for change, and public and private roles in making markets work.
- DFID needs to consider the implications of DBS for agriculture. In countries where DBS is the principal instrument for DFID engagement, but where governments are failing to deliver pro-poor agricultural growth, a twin-track approach should be considered involving DFID support for interventions specifically targeted towards agriculture.

- There is a need for DFID to establish firmer linkages between agricultural policy and hunger eradication. DFID's current Public Service Agreement (PSA) exerts authority on aid management instruments and DFID policy over the period 2003-06. The PSA states as a primary objective the eradication of poverty and extreme hunger in developing countries through achieving the MDGs by 2015. However, the PSA has no mention of the elimination of hunger anywhere else in the document. Hence, while hunger appears to hold as much importance as poverty eradication, it has been given no priority in DFID's medium-term strategy. Furthermore the word 'agriculture' is also excluded from the PSA and its relevance in alleviating poverty and affecting key indicators is only implied indirectly.
- DFID should engage more proactively in supporting the development of pro-poor agriculture policy and programmes in developing countries – for example, through the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Plan (CAADP). In 2003, the UK government made a commitment to be a champion for the developing world, yet (for some contributors to this forum) this rhetoric has not been translated into meaningful action. While CAADP may perhaps not be perfect, it is surely the UK government's best chance of supporting the continent's efforts. The forthcoming UK presidency of the EC is an ideal opportunity to promote these issues more widely within the EC.
- DFID needs to promote agricultural policy reforms that are inclusive of the poor and that account for gender implications (for example, supporting public policy in agriculture that support the endeavours of women farmers).