**Tipping the Balance finds gaps in agriculture policy**

Advocacy tool aims to shift public investment back to smallholder farmers, especially women.

Around the world, 500 million small-scale farms support nearly two billion people — almost one third of the global population. Apart from enhancing food security, their work is expected to reduce rural poverty, protect natural resources and strengthen communities’ resilience to climate change. To meet these high expectations, and in light of volatile food prices, governments have increased public investment in the sector. This has, however, largely facilitated private investment in agriculture, and the benefits have not trickled down to smallholder farmers.

In December 2012, Oxfam Great Britain and IIED published *Tipping the Balance: Policies to shape agricultural investments and markets in favour of small-scale farmers*, a report by Bill Vorley, Lorenzo Cotula and Man-Kwun Chan. Drawing on evidence from Guatemala, Nigeria, Tanzania and the Philippines, the report identifies policy levers that can tip commercial investments towards small-scale farmers. These levers range from issues such as gender laws and inclusive participation to policies affecting agricultural investment and market governance.

Throughout 2013, key policymakers and governments responded favourably to the report’s recommendations, raising expectations of a shift towards smallholders and women at policy and programme levels. The partners have taken every opportunity and ‘hook’ to promote elements of the report to different audiences, including within their own organisations.

**Slow wave of change**
The positive reception to the report is based on many factors. The collaboration enabled both IIED and Oxfam GB to maximise their strengths and minimise their perceived weaknesses. Known for its rigorous, evidence-based research, IIED benefited from Oxfam’s extensive development experience in the field, and vice versa. Oxfam GB was able to identify ways to deliver better results for small-scale farmers through policy, programmes and its GROW advocacy campaign. IIED built on two different policy strands: research on agricultural investment models and governance of agricultural markets.

The partners chose a path of quiet diplomacy to promote their findings. They met with policymakers and donors throughout 2013, followed by ongoing policy work at the national level in developing countries. This approach has extended the life of the report, which is critical since influencing policy is a long-term process.

The UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) was a natural audience for the report. Before the partners had a chance to contact DFID’s private sector team, however, the livelihoods team asked for a presentation to all country advisors and senior staff. It was particularly keen to expand its own knowledge of transparency and accountability mechanisms, to ensure investments in agriculture were delivering expected results.
IIED and Oxfam GB have identified levers that can tip commercial investment towards truly inclusive models that empower smallholders, particularly women from 20 countries, for example, debated the report with the authors. Oxfam GB also held webinars for programme and policy staff in country offices on the report. The discussions from three regions (Asia, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa) generated rich insights.

New communications technologies have helped promote the report, both internally and externally. Building on the two case studies published to date, country staff in Nigeria and Guatemala wrote blog posts on agricultural investment. Similar strategies will take place once the Philippines and Tanzania case studies are published. Other blog posts coinciding with World Food Day and the G8 2013 Summit harnessed *Tipping the Balance* to critique policies espoused by the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition. Many blog posts from IIED and Oxfam GB were cross-posted for greater reach.

In collaboration with its counterpart in Italy, Oxfam GB introduced the report’s findings to the Italian development ministry. The ministry focused on how donors could promote transparency to ensure greater accountability for their investments in agriculture. The minister, who took part in the meeting, insisted that the emerging global roundtable for vulnerable development would need to support high standards for accountability and transparency. IIED and Oxfam GB plan to target other strategic players of the Global Roundtable.

**Walking the talk**

Apart from influencing donors and governments, the project has generated internal reflection within the two organisations. Some 55 Oxfam specialists in 20 countries, for example, debated the report with the authors. Oxfam GB also held webinars for programme and policy staff in country offices on the report. The discussions from three regions (Asia, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa) generated rich insights.

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