

SECRETARY OF STATE
SPEECH AT THE FOUNDATION FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
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I am delighted to be here tonight, not least because it's a chance for me to talk about the importance of science and technology.

I am aware that there has been a perception in some quarters that DFID isn't doing enough on science— but I hope I can show that this perception may not fully reflect the work we are actually doing. I am also very happy to acknowledge, however, that we have things to learn from you. One thing that is clear is that we need to talk more, so that we understand each other better. I see this evening as the start of a bigger conversation between us.

Let me start this conversation by setting out where we in DFID are coming from.

DFID has an absolutely clear mission – to help reduce world poverty. Everything we do has to be judged against that yardstick – will it reduce poverty? What matters to me is outcomes – lives saved, people better off, children living to celebrate their 5th birthdays. I was in Ethiopia recently, and visited a clinic there. Far too many mothers die in childbirth. What really matters therefore is – how can we reduce those deaths?

Scientists have come to us with ideas on how to reduce such deaths. For example, it has been suggested, with evidence from Nepal, that mothers taking Vitamin A would prevent as many as 40% of maternal deaths. So DFID is spending £5 million on a trial with the Ministry of Health in Ghana, to see if this result can be generalised. We are keeping our fingers firmly crossed, but the results so far are encouraging. That is what we need –science at the service of the poor.

Take another example. Every day 16,000 people contract HIV/AIDS, and a further 8,000 will die from it. Women are increasingly the most affected, and they need a technology that they can control. This is where science can help. The UK is a world leader in microbicides. Imperial College and the Medical Research Council are developing microbicides, in the form of a cream or gel, that could reduce the chance of HIV/AIDS infection. DFID is putting £17m into this cutting-edge scientific research – indeed we were the first Government to do so – and large scale effectiveness trials of possible microbicides are now about to start in 5 African countries. With only moderate uptake, they could prevent 2.5 million deaths every three years.

Science and technology are of fundamental importance in the fight against poverty. There are vital problems for which developing countries need better solutions.

Malaria kills 3000 people every day, but there has been no new anti-malaria drug for 50 years. There is no vaccine against HIV/AIDS. We do not have adequate high-yielding, drought-resistant crops appropriate for the diverse and rapidly changing eco-systems of Africa. The list is a long one.

There are some areas where we do have answers, but these answers have not yet reached the poor. Two-thirds of deaths are from illnesses that we know how to cure. Most Kenyan farmers still use seed varieties that are 20 years old. We need much better links between researchers and users – not just discoveries, but innovations that are actually used. The Prime Minister has said of Britain that “Innovation, the exploitation of new ideas, is absolutely essential to deliver high-quality jobs, successful businesses, better products and services...” This is all the more true in developing countries.

DFID has been committing resources to scientific research to tackle these problems. We are in the top three countries for research spend by development agencies. The Central Research Department spent £80m last year, including £30m on agriculture, £26m on health, and £10m on infrastructure. I have announced an extra £30m over three years to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research.

I can also tell you today that we plan to increase our central research spend substantially in the next few years – from £80m last year to at least £100m in 2006/7. I have today posted on DFID's website our draft research strategy. It emphasises four main areas – agricultural productivity in Africa, killer diseases, the impact of climate change, and the problems of states that do not work in the interests of the poor. I warmly invite your comments on the draft.

It is, of course, crucial that developing countries have the capacity both to utilise science and to put research into practice. In practice, the quality of research capacity varies widely across the developing world – strong in China and India, but weak in much of Africa.

DFID supports capacity-building in four ways.

First, strengthening developing country research is built into our DFID research programmes. We expect our major research programmes to include capacity-building as one of their outputs. In the last three years, we have let almost half of the contracts for our agriculture research programme to developing country institutes.

We can point to considerable successes. Return for a moment to that Vitamin A trial in Ghana. It is a very major piece of work, involving over 100,000 women. In carrying it out over four years, the Kintampo Research Centre has already acquired invaluable skills, and is now a real resource for other clinical trials. Likewise, fifteen years of collaboration with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine has enabled the National Institute of Medical Research in Tanzania to run a HIV/AIDS laboratory to full WHO standards. Laboratories and clinical trials capacity are essential to Africa's ability to fight the diseases that kill so many of its children.

Secondly, and inter-related, DFID supports links between developing countries and the UK science base. UK science is a world leader in many fields. DFID's aid is untied – which means that by law we must not discriminate in favour of UK suppliers. But because the UK science base is world class, I am happy to say that UK researchers very frequently win open competitions for DFID research funds. This means that DFID's research programme has been able to underpin some of the long-term collaboration between UK research institutes and the developing world.

In addition, I am today announcing a redesigned DFID Higher Education Links Programme. It will enable stronger links to be built between universities in the North and those in the South. In 2003 the current programme funded 430 university links in 48 countries in partnership with 124 UK institutions. The new scheme will build on the strengths of this programme but with a stronger focus on sub-Saharan Africa, on support for the Millennium Development Goals, and, you will be pleased to hear, on capacity-building for science and technology. It will commence in April 2005 and we will invest £3m a year to the scheme once the programme is fully operational. I think it is important for us to back the enthusiasm and good will of partners both in Britain and in developing countries, to promote a valuable exchange of knowledge and skills.

Thirdly, DFID supports capacity-building through the international community. I have already mentioned the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research: it spends more than 20% of its \$400m budget on support for national agricultural research systems. We have just funded the International Foundation for Science to provide assistance to African

researchers to direct their activities towards meeting the needs of farmers. We support the efforts of several international bodies – including the World Health Organisation and the FAO - to allow developing country scientists free access to scientific journals.

Finally, DFID's regional and country programmes fund African science and technology capacity. Two examples:

- DFID has supported the establishment of the East African Network for the Monitoring of Anti-malarial Treatment. This has built up the skills available to Ministries of Health to set up high quality drug efficacy testing – and so decide which drugs to buy.
- I recently announced a £5m grant to the African Agricultural Technology Foundation, a new public-private partnership, led by Africans. Their job is innovation – identifying technologies held by the private sector that could be adapted for poor African farmers, and bringing them to market.

But the biggest contribution of DFID's country programmes to science and technology capacity building lies elsewhere. Where science capacity is weak in the developing world, the main causes are not in fact specific to science. Rather, they affect the whole public sector – unreliable finance, poorly paid and managed staff, weak and unreliable electricity or telecommunications. In too many places, there is also a lack of physical security. Tackling these issues is central to DFID's Country Programmes.

Return for the last time to that Ethiopian clinic, and to the prospects of Vitamin A reducing the deaths of mothers. You will readily agree that Vitamin A alone will not do the trick for those Ethiopian mothers. The clinic needs staff – who are regularly paid and trained and supervised. The clinic needs a reliable supply of drugs. The clinic needs a road so that urgent cases can be moved to hospital. And staffing, drug supply and roads all require government systems that work.

The main task of DFID's country offices is to support governments that are prepared to tackle these underlying problems. We are no longer devoted to funding individual projects – a road here, a training course there. Projects that aren't part of a government's own programme generally do not survive. Rather, we are backing broad Poverty Reduction Strategies – strategies that have put 2 million children into school in Uganda, and restored health systems in Mozambique.

Science holds out the opportunity of major benefits for the poor.

And for those opportunities to be seized, the country has to have working systems of government and of commerce.

And for all of these reasons, DFID is determined to back both science and systems that together can make a real difference to people's lives.