



MEDIA RELEASE

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CALL TO ACTION ON AGRICULTURE & AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT

For the first time in 25 years, the World Bank's flagship World Development Report calls for greater investment in agriculture. Six eminent Australian economists who were part of the team that developed the report believe that Australia has a special role to play and many benefits to receive from a new 'agriculture-for-development agenda'.

Dr Derek Byerlee, co-director of The World Bank's flagship World Development Report (WDR) titled *Agriculture for Development*, is in Australia to present the report to the Australian government and will also be part of a free public forum in Canberra on Friday.

Originally from a South Australian sheep/wheat farm, Dr Byerlee has worked in development for the last 25 years, and has dedicated his career to agriculture in developing countries. The other Australian's on the special World Bank team supporting the 'call to action on agriculture' include Kym Anderson, Philip Pardey, Julian Alston, Jock Anderson, and Will Martin.

"While some are talking about a world food crisis, I would certainly say that there are unprecedented pressures on agriculture from expanding demand for food, feed and biofuels; rising price of energy; increasing land and water scarcity; as well as the effects of climate change. More and better investment in agriculture and agricultural research is critical," said Dr Byerlee.

"Without greater attention to agriculture, the Millennium Development Goals of halving extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 will not be realized," he said.

"The agricultural and rural sectors have suffered from neglect and underinvestment over the past 20 years, despite an estimated 900 million rural people in the developing world living on less than \$1 a day."

"The time is right for Australia to show leadership in the development field and invest far more than the 5 percent of its official development assistance that currently goes to agriculture, and the less than 2 percent on agricultural research."

"Money invested in agriculture can be well-spent. GDP growth originating in agriculture is about four times more effective in reducing poverty than GDP growth originating outside the sector. As Australia's own history can attest, agriculture is the engine of growth for developing countries."

"Agriculture can offer pathways out of poverty if efforts are made to increase productivity in the staple foods sector; connect smallholders to rapidly expanding high-value horticulture, poultry, aquaculture, as well as dairy markets; and generate jobs in the rural non-farm economy."

“Agricultural growth has already been highly successful in reducing rural poverty in neighbouring East Asia over the past 25 years. The challenge is to sustain and expand agriculture’s unique poverty-reducing power, especially in South Asia where the number of rural poor people is still rising and will likely exceed the number of urban poor for at least another 30 years.”

“Aussie know-how can contribute much to a new ‘agriculture-for-development agenda’, and can provide global leadership, especially in applying agricultural science.”

He noted that Australian scientists have long experience in dealing with the challenges of dryland and tropical agriculture, knowledge that is directly relevant to conditions in many developing countries.

“I wish to make special note of the impact of the work carried out by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, which is held up internationally as an innovative example of support to agricultural science for development that pays high returns and benefits poor farmers and consumers in developing countries and also Australia.”

“For Australia, funding agricultural research is truly a win-win proposition. Benefits that Australia receives from IAR include mutually beneficial agricultural policy changes; advance information on markets for Australian commodities in developing countries; reduced risk of entry of weeds and of dangerous diseases and pests; early access to new germplasm and livestock breeds; shared technologies, and safer food.”

“International agricultural research centres supported by Australia return to us many times what we provide to them. For example, the value to Australia of the wheat germplasm generated by CIMMYT (the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre), where I once worked, has been estimated to be \$30 million each year.”

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The WDR2008 report and related materials are available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/wdr2008>