

# MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

As I stated to the Executive Council of the African Union in January 2011, Australia is a developed country from the 'south', and as such we are better placed to understand the challenges, obstacles and rewards of economic development. Approximately one billion people around the world now suffer chronic hunger, and Australia's neighbouring countries in the Asia-Pacific region are home to over half of those food-deprived people. A further one billion worldwide, living on less than US\$2 a day, are also categorised as poor and food insecure. Half the world's poorest people are smallholder farmers, excluded from opportunity because they cannot produce enough food to feed themselves, or sell for income.

While this is a global problem, the developing, and particularly the least developed, countries are the most vulnerable to food insecurity and price instability. These are the countries where agriculture provides livelihoods for up to 80% of the population.

Australia is positioned to make an increasing contribution to future global food challenges at levels beyond its ranking as a middle-sized developed economy. In this context, our country has a number of strengths on which to build our future involvement. Australia has:

- an agricultural system that produces a large food surplus on the driest inhabited continent, on low-quality soils and in the face of continual climate variability
- a competent and visible research and development (R&D) base and an agricultural R&D capability (together with capacity building) that leads the world in addressing the barriers that limit agricultural production in arid, semi-arid and tropical zones
- similar environmental and agroecological conditions and risks to those of a range of developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region and Africa
- strong networks and linkages to national and international research institutions
- an agricultural policy experience, including water and environmental challenges, that is of direct interest and relevance to many developing countries.

Australia has a clear capacity to build significantly on its present production, trade, research and rural-assistance achievements to become a world leader in agricultural research to address global food security. This will be progressed in the next year by:

- Australia's commitment to increasing its aid program, including agricultural research delivered by ACIAR, both as a direct contribution to poverty reduction and delivering on the Millennium Development Goals
- contributing to the emergence of stronger and more robust economies and societies within our region, and Africa, leading to increased demand for better food and nutrition, through exporting food and agricultural expertise
- expanding Australia's globally recognised agricultural research and capacity-building partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region and Africa to address productivity growth in smallholder systems; improved smallholder-market participation; and human and institutional capacity building for developing-country research institutions in partnership with Australian research agencies
- building on the current Australian Government 'Food Security through Rural Development' strategy, led by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), to provide immediate support for the vulnerable while building resilience and long-term food security, together with enhanced economic growth, in developing countries.

As the responsible Minister, I am fully cognisant of the need for early action to prevent recurring food crises and to alleviate widespread rural poverty. Facilitating the flow of agricultural research knowledge is one of Australia's most effective contributions to our region, and to the world's poorest countries.

Building on this success will be at the forefront of the Government's consideration of the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness, and will provide an immediate vehicle for ensuring that Australia's commitment to double the aid budget by 2015-16 continues to deliver benefits that help the world's poor.



**Kevin Rudd MP**  
Minister for Foreign Affairs