

Speech: Penny Mordaunt speech at Edinburgh University with Bill Gates

Thank you. I am delighted to be here with you today.

Ladies and gentlemen, our global food system is failing us. One seventh of the population are going hungry.

The threats to our food supplies from droughts, floods and other climate shocks are increasing.

Emerging food crop and infectious livestock diseases threaten human, animal and plant health globally.

Migration and conflict magnify the challenges for our humanitarian system.

Put this against the backdrop of a rapidly rising world population, and the urgency of the task is clear.

Science and technology has a vital role to play in meeting these global threats, and can transform development challenges into opportunities.

The good news is that we are making progress. The support that the Department for International Development gives to cutting-edge research in the UK, is saving and transforming lives all over the world – from drought tolerant maize, to speeding up tuberculosis diagnosis, to affordable energy paid for through mobile phones.

Technology and innovation are already transforming our humanitarian responses. I am proud to be standing alongside Bill Gates today. Bill and Melinda's foundation has been at the forefront of championing innovative approaches to tackling poverty for years, and it is a pleasure to be working alongside them.

Drones and satellites are helping us map affected areas after disasters such as earthquakes and floods. New digital technologies are helping track emerging diseases which threaten food crops.

But, with our humanitarian and food systems stretched to breaking point, we must resolve to do more.

My Department is committed to supporting outstanding science and innovation. We recognise its value in building a more secure, stable and prosperous world for us all.

This is why DFID is committed to investing 3% of our budget to research that will continue to drive global progress.

Our Research Review, published just over a year ago, sets out our plans to target our research funding on addressing the greatest global challenges of

the 21st century.

Our aim is to help communities and governments build their own capability and become dynamic vibrant economies. As our trading partners of the future, this is very much in the UK's interests.

In Rwanda, by using digital technology, DFID has helped the revenue authority raise taxes, so supporting a sustainable route out of poverty.

Our commitment to research will mean we can act faster, reach more people – and get the most out of every pound we spend on behalf of the UK taxpayer.

It is UK science that has been at the forefront in many of our biggest successes.

A British vet, Walter Plowright, won the 1999 World Food Prize for his work developing a vaccine to help eradicate the global threat of the deadly cattle virus rinderpest – responsible for impoverishing millions of poor farmers around the world.

Cambridge University works with the UK Met Office and international scientists to track and prevent deadly outbreaks of wheat rust. This disease can have a devastating impact on food supply in some of the world's poorest places.

Our scientists, including those I met today from Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities and from GALVmed – are at the forefront of efforts to help some of the world's poorest people. This is something British people can take pride in.

Agricultural development

Agricultural research is one of the most effective investments we can make in development.

But millions of farmers still lack access to the modern technologies that we take for granted here in the UK. This stifles the potential of African farming. It means that farmers can produce only a fraction of the food they could produce.

Without cattle that are protected from preventable illnesses and wheat that can withstand the threat of plant diseases – the lives and livelihoods of millions around the world are in jeopardy.

If we are to feed our world – in the nutritious way that enables people to thrive – we must speed up the pace of agricultural innovation. This will transform lives and economies all over the world.

That is why I'm proud to announce today new support from DFID to the global agriculture research system, the CGIAR.

New UK funding to the CGIAR will deliver crop varieties that are more productive, more nutritious and more resistant to droughts and flooding.

It will help poor farmers improve the health, wellbeing and productivity of their cattle and poultry.

Ultimately, UK Aid will help farmers put food on the table, educate their children and improve the climate resilience of their crops and livestock.

Importance of livestock

Millions of poor people around the world rely on livestock to feed their families, earn a living and send their children to school.

And Africa is changing fast. Urbanisation is driving great demand for livestock products. This provides wonderful opportunities for livestock producers.

But these new opportunities are currently hampered by untreatable livestock diseases. The sickness and death that results can devastate the livelihoods of farmers and their families and cause great suffering in livestock.

Not only that, but many of these diseases can pass to humans, and pose serious threat to the lives of the world's poorest people.

DFID's lasting commitment to research will continue to ensure rising demand for livestock is met in a way which benefits the poor, and protects and improves animal welfare and the environment.

Partnership with BMGF in agriculture and livestock research

To succeed, we must continue to work with our partners. That is why my Department joined forces with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2010 to tackle the most pervasive risks affecting poor farmers.

Together, we have supported a new drug for sleeping sickness in cattle – a disease which still kills three million animals each year and impoverishes farmers.

We are bringing cassava diseases under control, ensuring that the millions of people who depend on cassava can live secure and healthy lives.

And this morning I was impressed to see how we are working with the Foundation to develop a new and improved vaccine to combat brucellosis. This terrible livestock disease leads to huge economic losses every year – and is a danger to humans as well.

And we're not stopping there.

Today, at Edinburgh University, we are delighted to announce UK funding for the newly established Centre for Tropical Livestock Genetics and Health.

Over the next three years, scientists working here in Edinburgh will be transforming the lives of dairy and poultry farmers in Africa.

They will advance the science of cattle and poultry breeding to ensure that

the livestock sector meets its potential as a source of wealth and prosperity for many developing countries.

We will also support research to control bovine tuberculosis and other damaging livestock diseases.

Make no mistake – research investments like these are not only in the interests of some of the world's poorest. Tackling damaging livestock diseases is firmly in the national interest too. Diseases do not respect national borders.

They not only shatter the lives of poor farmers in Africa and Asia, but pose real risks to our own food supply. Tackling the spread of African Swine flu or better control of bovine TB for example, can only benefit UK farmers and consumers.

In this, and across all of my Department's work, we will actively ensure that animal welfare is protected and improved – recognising that animals are sentient, conscious beings worthy of moral consideration.

Conclusion

The UK is, and will remain, an outward-looking global research super-power.

We are proud of our outward-looking research culture here in the UK – and this government is committed to maintaining our position as a global leader in this field.

But no one country has all the answers today. We need to work across continents on bold, innovative solutions that harness the best of human ingenuity.

We know we can deliver spectacular results when we pool our resources and expertise.

To do this, we will continue to drive innovation through our strong partnerships – with UK academia, with the private sector and with our friends at the Gates Foundation.

Harnessing UK technology and innovation will help us reduce poverty and alleviate suffering and delivers a safer, more secure world for Britain too.