

## **DEEP CONCERN: PATEL'S NEW GROWTH PATH (NGP) SUPPORTS GREEN REVOLUTION FOR SMALL HOLDER FARMERS AND BIOFUELS**

### **STATEMENT BY THE AFRICAN CENTRE FOR BIOSAFETY**

Dear friends and colleagues, the ACB is deeply disturbed and disappointed that Minister Patel's NGP has not embraced new thinking on agriculture policy which requires breaking from a wholly inequitable and ecologically unsustainable chemical-dependent system. The NGP lacks vision as it has missed an important moment to move South Africa towards systems that reconnect food producers with their local ecologies and communities. We are also gravely concerned by the support for biofuels as an employment driver in the so-called 'Green Economy'.

The NGP cites 'opportunities for 300,000 households in agriculture small holder schemes', yet details as to what these schemes might entail are absent. Separate mention is made of the need to address the high cost of fertilizers and other inputs. According to the NGP, this lack of affordability is viewed as a serious impediment to small-holder agriculture. It does appear to us that the NGP is advocating in favour of the adoption of a 'Green Revolution' system of agriculture for small-holder farmers in South Africa.

Funded by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, the original 'Green Revolution' prescribes a very particular, and alien, agricultural model on small holders across the developing world. Farmers are supplied with hybrid seeds (which had to be re-purchased every season) that require massive doses of chemical inputs and irrigation. The results have been devastating, including: crippling farmer indebtedness, mass migrations from the countryside to urban slums, a precipitous loss of biodiversity and soil nutrients, and drastically dwindling water resources.

Despite a focus on small-holder agriculture, the NGP has failed to pay any attention to the role of women and their particular needs and contributions towards socially just and ecologically sustainable agricultural systems. Throughout Africa, less than 1% of the total agricultural credit goes to women, yet women provide the backbone of agricultural production.

Support for biofuels is disturbing, since biofuels actually require more energy to produce than they provide. In many countries, enclosure of vast tracts of land for biofuels production has led to the violent dispossession of some of the world's poorest communities, and had devastating impacts on international food prices. If Patel's Plan in South Africa is aimed at large scale commercial farmers, how much scope will there actually be for increased employment creation? For small-holders growing biofuels feedstocks, how secure will this 'employment' be? What guarantees can the government give that they won't simply become modern indentured laborers? Calls to 're-open' the biofuels debate, particularly in relation to maize, have been given added currency by the 4 million ton surplus of maize produced in South Africa this year. This surplus has brought no benefit to the millions of South Africans who are unemployed or live below the poverty line, while as many as one third of South African maize farmers maybe rendered insolvent. If our agricultural system presently fails to feed so many, what will happen when millions of tons of maize are diverted to fuel our vehicles?