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A new paper published in Science, an international magazine, warned that billions of dollars promised to fund programmes to boost small-scale agriculture in developing countries are likely to fail in feeding the world's increasing populations, the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), reported here in a statement on Saturday.

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ILRI said the failure to feed the poor is in part because of increasing populations and climatic changes that has been made worse by an absence of 'intellectual commitment to the ubiquitous small-scale 'mixed' farmers who raise both crops and animals and are the source of much of today's food supplies and economic development.'

The authors of the report, who are scientists from ILRI, the International Food Policy Research Institute, the [International Water Management Institute](#), the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research and the World Bank, urged wealthy countries, which pledged US\$ 20 billion for developing countries' agriculture at the G-8 Summit in Italy last year, to look beyond "business as usual" investments.

Mr. Mario Herrero, ILRI senior scientist and the paper's lead author, said, "In most regions of the world, farming systems are under intense pressure. But the problems are not the same everywhere. In the past, farmers have developed the ability to adapt to small changes, in terms of weather patterns and access to fertile land and water. But the rapid rates of change seen in many developing countries today outstrip the capacity of many to adapt."

Smallholder mixed farmers, particularly in Africa and Asia, have been overlooked by

donors and policymakers because they typically cultivate small plots of land, where they grow modest amounts of staple crops such as rice and maize while also tending a few cows, goats or chickens.

The analysis reported that small farms that combine crop and livestock production supply much of food staples of developing countries - 41 per cent of maize, 86 per cent of rice and 74 per cent of millet - and most of the meat and dairy products consumed in these regions as well.

It said the so-called 'mixed systems' could be models of efficient farming, with livestock providing the draft power to till the land and left-over crop residues serving as feed for animals.

'Moreover, the eggs, milk and meat from livestock routinely serve as important sources of regular household income, of high-quality protein, as well as a buffer against failed harvests,' the statement said.

The authors cautioned that realising the potential of the crop - livestock approach will require reorienting agricultural policies to support small-holder farmers facing an array of challenges that over the next 20 years will challenge farmers' ability to stay abreast of population growth.

These challenges include climate change, which will alter growing conditions among other factors; an explosion in demand for livestock products, particularly in Asia and competition for finite natural resources, including water, arable land and fossil fuels needed to produce fuel and fertilizer.

Nairobi - Pana 14/02/2010

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