



Global Donor Platform
for Rural Development

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Global Donor Platform for Rural Development segment - Interview transcript

[Starts at 57-minute mark on podcast]

Willem Olthof (Deputy Head, Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships, European Commission)

Conrad Rein (Policy Officer, Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships, European Commission. Conrad is also a Co-Chair of the Global Donor Platform)

Welcome to the third of our four part miniseries from the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development which is currently hosted by IFAD. We are going to hear from leaders in the donor world about the issues that matter to them.

The Platform is a network and partnership of 40 influential donors including international development agencies, financial institutions, intergovernmental organizations and foundations.

The membership aims to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, through collective influencing and knowledge sharing, so that donors can successfully lobby for policies and increased funding in agriculture and rural development.

We are taking you to Brussels to speak with our two guests from the European Commission. Joining us from the Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships are Willem Olthof, Deputy Head, and Conrad Rein, Policy Officer. Conrad is also a Co-Chair of the Global Donor Platform.

Our reporter Luca Passacantilli starts by asking Conrad about what keeps him up at night.

Conrad Rein: I watched the launch of the global report on food crisis yesterday and I'm still shocked about the unimaginable number of 193 million people that experience food insecurity around the world last year, an increase of an astonishing 40 million people compared to 2020. All this mostly caused by conflicts but also better extremes, climate change and economic shocks. With COVID-19, the climate crisis and the war in Ukraine, the situation is already even worsening day by day. This is absolutely unbelievable and unacceptable. So these issues keep me up tonight, and there is at least some hope, I consider the strengthening of coordination among donors, along with the mobilisation of responsible investment in food systems, as the most crucial area, and that is where the global donor platform has a leading role to play.

I'm very pleased that we released an excellent White paper last month which, as a follow up to the Food System Summit, outlines the ways in which donors can support the necessary food systems

transformation and thereby address the unacceptable current situation I described and a situation we are all aware of.

So I have not lost hope and dedicate my daily work towards the strengthening of coordination among donors at EU level as well as at global levels through the global donor platform.

GDPRD/Luca Passacantilli: Yes, indeed, there is still much work to be done. Thank you for joining us, Wim. It's a pleasure to have you here. Please tell us about the European Commission, also from the European Commission perspective, what is being done about the issues Conrad has just talked about?

Willem Olthof: Thanks. Yes, the European Commission it's a donor of course in in the world but I think we're more than a donor we're also providing quite some policy guidance and discussing about policies with others in in the world.

I would think we have two major roles. One is to work with our partner countries in order to improve the sustainability of Agri food systems in the world. The second is to engage in evidence based discussions with many stakeholders in the world, farmers, researchers and with policymakers in order to do the right things for the people and for the planet. That requires us to do a lot of coordination work. That's first of all. We have many delegations around the world, so we talk with our delegations in about 140 countries.

Not all of them work on Agri food systems, but certainly we work in in about 70 countries very closely on agrifood system and rural development questions we also coordinate a lot with let's say our colleagues within the European Commission.

We also coordinate a lot with our colleagues in the Agricultural Director general or the Director general that deals with consumer questions and food safety for instance.

So coordination is part of our work within the Commission, but also outside, and that is where the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development is so important. We need platforms for coordination, because there are so many actors in the world. If we say what is the core of what we do? That is indeed to support the transition to sustainable Agri food systems in the world. And that is through practical cooperation. We do that by supporting research and innovation, for instance in supporting the international centres of agricultural research, but also structures and innovation centres in our partner countries. We do it by supporting sustainable Agri value change, for instance.

The entire Sustainable Cocoa initiative that the European Commission has taken a year ago, together with Cody Var in Ghana, in order to improve the livelihoods of cocoa farm. Us in return as well in in one package with reduction of child labour and the reduction of the deforestation of the areas where cocoa is grown.

What we do as a donor and what makes us a bit unique is that we have a multiannual perspective. We usually work on the basis of budgets and programmes for a period. Or 4 to 7 years and we've just gone through an exercise of this programming for the next couple of years in 2021 and we will be working with 50 to 70 partner countries, all aspects of food systems, 50 in in more detail, 70 all in a little bit more extensive way and that so we have in front of us quite a programme of support.

And we would like to do that in a coordinated manner with our Member States, but also with other actors in this area.

GDPRD/Luca Passacantilli: Thank you, that was really insightful. Could you tell us about the challenges you face? What does it take to overcome these obstacles?

Willem Olthof: Well, there are many challenges and I think I will highlight three terms of our daily work and the work that we do on in order to improve the functioning of our great food systems and

that entails agriculture, it entails the processing of agricultural food products. It entails consumption aspects and it entails the whole way as well in which everyone works together and in which benefits are passed on and incomes there for a long D system.

Now three challenges are sent. First, we have an information challenge. I think there's no shortage of information, but there is, on the other hand, probably too much. Information that is not always organised very well. And we are confronted with sometimes too many provisions of information and we need a bit of streamlining.

We have excellent organisations in in the world and that is why we ask them to do some of that streamlining, indeed off of the information, but I still think we can do that much better that refers to information about what is happening on food insecurity in the world. Conrad made reference to the global reported food crisis. I think that is an excellent example of where we came together with 14 different actors to streamline all that information and bring everything together in an organised manner, but that can be done in many other ways as well, around research, around signs, linking up to policy et cetera.

So that's one challenge that we still have. Second is the challenge around coordination. As I mentioned before, there are many actors in in the food security and the food systems sphere. There are many demands. Nation and it requires a number of stable platforms in which to do that where we can meet with these actors and the Global Donor Platform is a very valuable one where donors meet but sometimes also with others.

And the third is a bit of a political point and that is that in general people and that includes our politicians they expect very quick results and very easy success stories while the reality on the ground is very difficult sometimes. And so the matching of expectations that and I said the politicians but it's also very often the general public with what one can do as a donor is there. There's a bit of a mismatch there and the management of that expectation is one of the challenges that that I think we face and again I think when we tackle challenges together, we can probably do that much better.

GDPRD/Luca Passacantilli: Thank you so much for your answer. Conrad, the European Commission is a board member of the Global Donor Platform and you are also Co-chair of the platform. How does this complement your work?

Conrad Rein: As European Commission, we coordinate our policies and programmes closely with our Member States through regular exchanges as well as formal and informal meetings.

At the same time, we absolutely need such coordination and exchanges among the donor community at the global level.

And the Global Donor Platform has clearly a crucial role to play in this. I am very thankful for all the valuable work the Platform is doing, including through its three thematic working groups as well as through its publications and events, and I can assure you that the Platform is very present in my daily work and its value is undoubted.

Concluding, I hope that there are more donors that will see the benefits of the Platform and join us in the spirit that we are stronger and more efficient if we coordinate.