



Global Donor Platform
for Rural Development

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Global Donor Platform for Rural Development segment - Interview transcript

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Dede Ekoue (IFAD Country Coordinator, Nigeria)

Nadine Gbossa: What is keeping me up at night, I mean, it's really related to my function. For three years in a row, the number of hungry people in the world has been rising. We are now having more than 700 million people who are going hungry every day and we know that with COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine, this number could increase by another 19 million this year. What is clear today is that the capacity of the world food system to feed the world is becoming a global challenge, and in my view, it requires global action like climate and COVID-19. But, too many people are ignorant of the criticality of the food system issues. They have become accustomed about hearing about hungry people, you know, hundreds of million people are hungry in Asia, in Africa, in Latin America and nobody loses sleep over this, and I don't think it's acceptable. In a world where 1/3 of the food goes to waste, that we get used to people going hungry, and also the fact that hunger is also increasing in Western countries. You see it, walk on the street, you will see people going hungry, homeless people. And OECD is also reporting that hunger is increasing in OECD countries, in emerging economies. It has become a global problem. We must tackle it and that keeps me awake at night.

GDPRD/Sierra Berardelli: And what about you, Dede? What currently keeps you up at night?

Dede Ekoue: Personally, having lived through food insecurity, I'm committed to ensuring that food systems lead to access, accessibility and affordability of food for all. I remember as a child living in a rural area, it was difficult for many children in the school coming from low-income families to have food. At the same time, when I was in urban area myself, I lacked food for some time. And food equity, food access, for me, is an important right. And I'm happy to be here in Nigeria, where IFAD supports the Nigerian government and other stakeholders on implementing the national food system transformation policy that has been enacted here. This food system transformation requires action from all the sectors and from different groups of stakeholders. This means that coordination is key. Here in Nigeria, the government, private sector, civil society, all want to build a coordination system that can lead to better synergy, more concerted action and enhanced investment in inclusive, innovative, resilient food systems. So, this coordination element is something that keeps us up at night, but with the support of the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development we are also learning new ways of promoting active cooperation that leads to meaningful partnership.

GDPRD/Sierra Berardelli: For my next question, what can key donors do to help countries reshape their national food systems?

Nadine Gbossa: Sierra, we are in a situation today where the financing of food system transformation must happen in a context where developing countries are operating in a drastically challenging financial landscape. What do I mean, is that basically, they are in a tighter fiscal space and financial conditions and they have to find the means to live up to the commitment to prioritize food system transformation in the national budget? What donors can do to help them doing that, by stepping up their development assistance, I think everybody is familiar with ODA, and also their commitment to international financial institutions like IFAD so that they can support the countries in the national response. What organizations like IFAD can do as well is to basically activate rapid disbursement mechanisms, raise access limit, and apply more flexible conditions for these countries, because we must recognize the countries in which we are living? But I would like to add a final point, is that it's not only about putting more donor money into the country but ensure the coherence between these development assistances and the policies of these countries. We cannot have development assistance at one level which is not up to meeting the requirements and have, for example, 700 billion subsidies a year in OECD countries, which depress prices, make it more difficult for local producers in developing countries to compete and does not allow them to make a decent livelihood. So, coherence goes hand in hand with increased donors' investment.

GDPRD/Sierra Berardelli: Thanks so much for that response, Nadine. And over to you, Dede.

Dede Ekoue: We have to have alignment with what the country has decided as strategy for the food systems transformation. We need to work more together, building a common perspective of what are the issues and what are the opportunities. The 2nd element that is important is to help the country as the countries coordinate this food system transformation process. The third element that is important for donors also is to build the capacity and support the government in ensuring that incentives and policies are put in place to mobilize private sector investment in agriculture, because we know the public funding can go to a certain level, but it cannot satisfy all the needs in terms of financing for the food system transformation to be a reality. The 4th element that I would like to highlight in terms of donor support is that we know that youth are a strong force. In Nigeria, we have at least 30% of the population that is between 15 years old and 30, so this is a strong force that we need to mobilize to boost the productivity and also the competitiveness of agriculture in the country. In a nutshell, coordination among donors is very key. 2030 is just at the corner, so we need to find ways to work better and more together to be able to deliver the superior support to the beneficiary countries.

GDPRD/Sierra: How does the current global food crisis make this more challenging for countries to reshape their national food systems?

Nadine Gbossa: Well, Sierra, with this new crisis and millions of people at risk of food insecurity again, the major risk I'm seeing is that governments and donors shift their attention from this food system transformation agenda to emergency assistance and quick fix to protect the most vulnerable. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that this emergency assistance is not needed, what I'm saying is that it's not one or the other. If we don't start working also on the structural reasons that lead to these recurrent crises, we will just be moving from crisis to crisis. So, for us, working with the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development is really an opportunity to bring back these issues to attention in partnership with IFAD, in partnership with the United Nation Coordination Hub to make sure that the donors pay attention to the food system transformation agenda and all the efforts do not go only in addressing this crisis because otherwise it will be recurrent. Today it's COVID-19, tomorrow it is the Ukraine war, we don't know what next will come, but we need to deal with the structural change to deal with this dual objective, address the short-term crisis and making sure that we deal with the structural challenges, that will mean that tomorrow hunger will be a story of the past.

GDPRD/Sierra: And Dede, what does this current global crisis mean for the food sector?

Dede Ekoue: In the case of Nigeria, we have the issue of insecurity. We have also the energy crisis. All this is leading to inflation and this inflation affects the food sector in different ways. It's really important to look at this crisis as an opportunity to accelerate the food system transformation. In the short term, it's

true that it's leading to some challenges, but it is also fast forwarding the process of thinking in an innovative way, thinking out-of-the-box. So, one of the key elements here is that we need to think more of production of inputs for agriculture in country. And especially, for example, for fertilizer, encouraging nature-based solutions for increasing the yields of our farmers, that's one way of looking at it. The second element is the value chain. It's becoming more important to localize the value chain, increasing the local content. So, these are elements that are response to crisis, looking at the crisis as an immediate shock, but turning it around as a strategic opportunity to write a better narrative for the future.