



Global Donor Platform  
for Rural Development

### **GDPRD Segment in Farms. Food. Future. IFAD Podcast EP43**

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## Podcast Transcript

**Michelle:** Thank you, David, for joining us on the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development segment in the IFAD podcast. I've been looking forward to this conversation with you.

We start all our segments wanting to know the same thing and that is, what are the issues that keep you up at night?

**David:** Thank you for having me, Michelle. Two type of issues keep me up at night.

One is climate change and what will be the next climate shock that can actually cause major disruption in the food system and create a lot of suffering for vulnerable people?

And the other is how good are the different datasets I am working with.

Sometimes I wake up to check some rows and data points because a mistaken target can lead to a mistake in policy advice.

Mistaken policy advice can lead to bad policies, and bad policies can hurt people as much as the weather, shock or discriminate.

**Michelle:** That's a big issue that can keep you up at night and a huge responsibility on your end. Now, even though that we are increasingly surrounded by data and are not always aware of how it informs our own decisions, people often think that data is boring. Now, what would you say to that, David?

**David:** I will say that data are not boring. It's like if you tell me that letters are boring in the book. It's what you do with them, how they are combined.

In itself, they may be a bit boring, but actually data tell you stories, stories about countries, stories about people.

It helps you to understand the world even if you have not been in some places, even if you have not met some people.

So data in your field is like a wonderful book. Just read it and you will discover new things.

Of course, some books can be a bit boring depending on who is the author and what you prefer, but I'm pretty sure that anyone can find the type of data that will excite him or her and allow them to learn new things.

**Michelle:** Thanks for that, David. I am curious to know, when was the first time that you yourself realized that data was exciting, interesting and actually very important?

**David:** I think the first time I really started to deal seriously with data when I was still a child.

I like to fish and I was starting to get logbooks about all the fishes I was catching depending on the temperature, the day, the place and things like this.

I start to say oh, I can understand how the fishes behave just by the type of logbook I had.

And so, yes, and since then, looking at the data, analysing it and seeing pattern among the data, it has actually been a big source of inspiration in my life and why I'm an economist.

And beyond being a data expert, I am also a modeller, so how we see this backbone behind the data that help us to understand the world that is pretty complex and sometimes yes, we can be just surrounded by so many data where we get lost. So that are important, but we need to understand what is behind them to make sense of it.

**Michelle:** Thank you for that. And hopefully this will inspire some of our listeners to pay attention and also inspire our young listeners to have a career in in this field.

Now, what are the stories behind what data in agriculture and food systems is telling us? And could you share some of your own experiences of how data has helped to pave the way to achieving SDG2 Zero hunger and to transforming our food systems?

**David:** Yes. And it really takes place at very different levels.

But I will say the first thing is, if we don't have data on a specific topic or on a specific group of population, they tend to disappear from discussion.

If we don't measure problem - in many cases, we cannot even discuss it or solve it.

So, I think that data already makes sure that something is part of the agenda.

And then after, when you have the right data or the good data, then you can actually change things.

For example, you can say everyone is focusing on, let's say Country A because everyone was looking at a country for the last 20 years. But when we started to have data on Country A, B, and C, you can start to say to people, C is a problem. No one has really taken care of Country C for many years, and that's what we should prioritize.

What I have seen in some of the projects and discussions I have been is, when you can show this, then you start to see money, instead of just going to Country A where the money is not used very

efficiently because there are not so many problems to solve anymore, going to Country C where you change the lives of people and get a higher rate of return for the money from donors and that's good.

And what I say for countries is also true for households. When you look at the household survey, even if all this data may have been made anonymous, you understand that this household is a retired woman living alone, getting by with a vegetable garden.

The type of support and interventions you will need is very different because it's never going to become commercial, you know, a trader, but you see another family that have a different demographic structure that have different needs. And therefore, you can really target the type of solution and intervention to different people.

Because I think that's the key message here. The world is complex. There is no one solution for everyone. There is not an average farmer. There's not an average country and we need this detailed information to really fix and improve the different parts of the food system we want, with the right solution at the right place.

**Michelle:** Thank you for that, David. Now, if there is one message you would like all our listeners to walk away with, what would it be and why?

**David:** Data is needed, and data is fun. OK, so that's what you should care about.

But just also, don't be just blind by just the word data, or even to the big data.

Having data on everything will not solve your problem per se.

You still need to understand them, to analyze them, to process them and to make recommendations from them.

Data is the beginning not the end. But if you don't have the beginning, you will never get to the end.

**Michelle:** That's such a powerful message. Thank you, David, for joining us on the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development segment in the IFAD podcast. And it's been a real pleasure to have you join us today. Thank you.

**David:** Thank you, Michelle.