



Global Donor Platform  
for Rural Development

## **GDPRD Segment in Farms. Food. Future. IFAD Podcast EP45**

**Nikita Eriksen-Hamel**

*Deputy Director, Agriculture and Food Systems for Global Affairs Canada*

### Podcast Transcript

**GDPRD Secretariat/Monique Amar:** Thank you so much for joining us today, Nikita. So, we start all our podcast segments for the platform out with this same question. What are the issues that currently keep you up

**Nikita Eriksen-Hamel:** Thank you, Monique. Well, we know that global hunger has been increasing since 2015 and it's been particularly affected in the past several years with the economic disruptions from the pandemic and from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The cumulative impacts from these events and that continued pressure and stress from climate change has led to a dramatic increase in food prices, and these food prices are one of the most difficult challenges for the development community to address.

And it's a major concern how these food prices are felt most strongly by the poorest and the most vulnerable populations, particularly women and girls. The poor and vulnerable can spend up to 70-75% of their income on food, so any significant change in food prices will further drive the poor towards cheaper and less nutritious food and just exacerbate those malnutrition rates that we know are, already high.

We also know that the existing gender inequalities are leading women and girls to eat least and last and all of this disproportionately deepens their hunger, their malnutrition, their poverty rates. So, the issue of high food prices, excessive volatility of food prices, high food price inflation, you know, these are the ones that define the fundamental relationship between a farmer and a consumer. We know that the low prices and or excessive volatility of market prices will discourage long term investments by farmers. We don't want that.

On the other hand, high market prices are unaffordable for consumers and drive further poverty and nutrition. So, we don't want that either and the food price inflation that we're all facing right now, right, and this is a common challenge in developed countries and developing countries. So fundamentally, our production of food is not meeting our population growth and the complexity of this problem requires sustainable intensification of agriculture.

And this leads me to my second major challenge, this the sustainability challenge, and this is a really daunting one. I think there's two problems here that are very difficult to address.

The first is that we've not yet figured out how to decouple global agricultural production from nitrogen fertilizer. The world needs to use natural gas fossil fuels to maintain current production of world calories, right, they're still not a perfect pathway to net zero agriculture and we need to pollute to feed ourselves.

The other challenge is how to apply all these solutions in a way that makes sense for farmers. And we need to move away from promoting best practices towards promoting a set of best fit solutions that best fit the resource and the capacity needs of each and every farmer we know that agrifood systems are complex and there will not be a unique best practice that solves the complexity of all these issues, right?

Therefore, it's important that we adopt outcome-based models of agriculture, they present a diversity of solutions that can be adapted by farmers for their own perspectives and for their own resource constraints and realities.

Now common across most of these is the issue of good soils, there's always consensus on good soil fertility and good soil health, right? It's not a controversial issue. So, I think we need to ensure that each and every farmer has the ability to deliver the best set of outcomes, for food, for nutrition, for income, for jobs, for resilience, for biodiversity, for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, we're asking a lot out of agriculture and out of farmers, and we need to provide them with a set of solutions.

**Monique:** So, you mentioned the food prices and the sustainable intensification as these two main critical issues that you see and, on this note, what are Canada's development priorities in agriculture, rural development, and food systems?

**Nikita:** As many people know, the Feminist International Assistance Policy, is Canada's principal International Development Policy Framework under FIAP, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment are the principal objectives of Canada's International Development assistance.

Now in agriculture and food systems, our work promotes the implementation of gender sensitive policies and approaches that support women's rights and empowerment, Canada tries to embrace a food systems approach to improve how our development assistance addresses this complexity of development challenges. And this approach takes into consideration also inclusion and equity objectives and really has a particular focus on vulnerable groups. We're working to strengthen the resilience of these vulnerable populations and the resilience of the agrifood systems on which they depend so that they can be better prepared for future climate shocks, agronomic shocks like plant disease outbreaks or economic trade disruptions or conflicts.

**Monique:** Now, you've been involved with the Donor Platform for quite a long time now, so how has the donor community evolved over the course of your career? What do you think remains the biggest challenge and what has the most potential for better donor dialogue and collaboration in the future?

**Nikita:** Biggest challenge over the past 15 years, or the biggest change has been a shift towards multi stakeholder partnerships, right, that we've seen a greater diversity of development actors come together to advocate for common issue. And these partnerships, they do add a lot of value in bringing a diversity of perspectives and I think more importantly creating a whole of society momentum behind an issue.

However, they're not without their own challenges, But I think the global donor platform has always provided an excellent venue to bring donors and its partners together for challenging policy dialogues. And so, I think this remains a relevant task and function of the platform.

Another second major change we've seen is one of scope, and increasingly we're seeing less distinction between a global issue and a development issue, right, and the pandemic and the war in Ukraine are two great examples of global challenges affecting both developed and developing countries and requiring solutions that involves international actors across the globe.

**Monique:** Thank you so much, Nikita, and very interesting to hear from you how this space has evolved over the past years. Now, if there's one message that you would like our listeners to walk away with what would it be and why?

**Nikita:** Food is at the center of many serious challenges of our time, whether it's climate change, hunger, poverty, gender equality. Food systems are a different, yet very powerful way to view how we as society are organized.

It's more than just agriculture or value chains but includes a broader set of economic and social activities that define how we live and more importantly, how we as a human species, consume resources for our daily survival.

We are all guilty of creating new policy constructs to communicate a new message, to promote a new areas of working, right, we've created climate smart agriculture, gender transformative approaches in agriculture, nature-based solutions, but in each of these policy constructs, we have to remember that at the field level, the principal beneficiary of our work, is the farmer, the crop or livestock farmer, the forester, or the fisher, but essentially at the root of all of our work is the farmer.

So, whether we work in agriculture or rural development or in other sectors like environment, climate change, health, I think using a food systems approach will help us better appreciate the perspectives and the needs of farmers, and ultimately, appreciate the principal beneficiary who has so much impact on the rest of the development landscape.

**Monique:** Absolutely. This was Nikita Eriksen-Hamel, who is the Deputy Director of Agriculture and Food Systems for Global Affairs Canada. Thank you so much, Nikita.