



Global Donor
Platform for
Rural Development

GDPRD Miniseries for IFAD Podcast Farms. Food. Future.

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IFAD's Farm. Food Future Podcast Episode 55 - Women shaping sustainable food systems.

What are the issues that keep you up at night?

When you work on climate change and international security, you can find lots of things to worry about.

I'm thinking about how we can protect the political institutions that we've built in times of relative plenty. And I recognize that's not been the case everywhere in the world, but in a lot of places, how can we protect them and keep shoring them up?

In the face of scarcity, when there's many more disputes over who should have their resources there, that our experience, that history, is that humanity is not always very good at dealing with scarcity.

I don't think scarcity is necessary, but there will be a redistribution discussion to have and how come we have that in a way that deals are fair to everybody? I think that's a big challenge ahead of us.

Is there anything that you can share from a personal experience that really left an impact on you?

Well, I suppose having been in Rome at the Committee on Food Security and seeing the stress that the conflict Russia's invasion of Ukraine has created a lot of conflicts around. Who speaks for who and who can represent who and different regional groups and of course, the current and very tense and violent situation between Israel and Palestine.

These are examples in the international context that I just saw, where the goodwill to work on food security plans and a gender empowerment framework get put in the shade by the reality that countries have to keep getting on even in what seems like impossible circumstances to find the understanding.

I think there's hope that we have weathered these kinds of storms. The UN was born out of wanting to find a diplomatic way out of conflict. But the reminder is that the conflicts do continue to come, and each time they do really stress our ability to come to shared agreement on how to cooperate across borders.

This year's Annual General Assembly is a moment to pause and reflect on 20 years of rural development and aid effectiveness. What have been the major shifts and what has truly made a difference?

Often times, we get caught up so much in the day-to-day that we don't step back and say, hey, what's changed? One of the biggest changes for me is a willingness of states to reengage in social policy and a willingness of the international system and the donor community to support that reengagement.

Twenty years ago, it was a really strong sense that the state had to get out of the way of the market and encourage the market to make decisions.

We've really changed a lot, most recently and dramatically with COVID-19 where states spent a lot of money, and it made a difference. Many states, including some of the poorest, had social protection channels through which to put money to help people, to provide income to even very poor households in very poor countries.

That has been an important reminder of the state's obligations and to understand that the state and market have an interactive relationship and that is what we want to hold on to. We do want to protect the things that the state can do and that the market doesn't do well on its own.

Personally, the biggest change has that a lot of people in my life, from my hairdresser to my grandmother, are now willing to understand food issues in a way that they didn't before. They used to need explaining why agriculture mattered.

Climate change is one of the more alarming reasons why people think about food and food price inflation. But more broadly, people care more about food and have more sense of food coming from somewhere, having a history and a context. That makes everybody's life easier in our world of policy and food security change.

Great. Thank you for that, Sophia.

Looking at the next 20 years, what needs to happen to truly make a difference in rural communities and tackle food insecurity? What is the key ingredient in getting donors to coordinate better and with tangible results?

The most important thing for rural communities is to have a greater share of the economic benefits of agriculture.

In developed countries, some of the highest incidence of poverty and exclusion are in rural communities. That's because money in the food system is not being made on the farm and rural spaces, but rather in more concentrated capital processing, like food processing centers and producers.

For rural communities to thrive, we need a different model for agriculture that does a better job of capturing capital locally and circulating that capital locally.

In the next 20 years, it's going to become more important because there's no resilience without that and we forecast more and larger shocks to the food system as climate change continues inexorably.

In terms of donors and coordination, it's a big challenge. The fact that development organizations need to answer to taxpayers and to the cabinet and leadership interests of a given government and then has to also be true to its own internal priorities which often shift each time a new Minister comes in.

It's hard to then expect cooperation.

I appreciate that the Global Donor Platform is a place where these conversations happen, which is crucial. Just allowing people to meet and know one another is already a soft part of helping coordination come about.

Thank you so much, Sophia.