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CELEBRATING AGRICULTURE FOR DEVELOPMENT

Outcomes, impacts and the way ahead

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Editor Ann Milligan

Science for nourishing the world, sustainably – Q&A

Chair: Dr Cate Rogers

Q: Peter Wynn, Charles Sturt University

Thanks, Andrew, for that excellent talk. You mentioned the supply of fish for protein for developing countries, but given the carbon footprint of the ruminant species – of goats, sheep, cattle, etc. – do you think the supply of meat from these species still has a place in the food basket for these developing countries too?

A: Andrew Campbell

The livestock debate and the methane debate is very frustrating, really, because often people lump all livestock farming together, though there is a very big difference between a Kansas feedlot and a smallholder with a handful of livestock that for them are as much capital as they are income. The grass-fed smallholder livestock operations in developing countries are very different from an industrialised feedlot for McDonald's somewhere in the midwest of the US, but people often conflate the two.

That said, methane is an incredibly important story and the focus on methane is not going to go away. So I think it is very good that MLA (Meat and Livestock Australia) and others have got out in front and set themselves ambitious targets.

There is some very exciting science – asparagopsis and so on: methane-reducing feeds and potential genomic tools – that can be used in the gut microbiome. There is a very important research agenda there. There is also a very important research agenda around the full life cycle in more intensive operations – a circular economy approach, where you are actually producing energy rather than consuming it, and where you are catching methane and so on.

But to 'badmouth' livestock and ruminants in smallholder agriculture in developing countries, in my view, is just completely misguided and misinformed.

Q: Faruq Isu, Pinion Advisory, a conference scholar

I am originally from Bangladesh, and my question relates to that. How difficult is it to set up a research program, particularly in developing nations, given certain policies around that? They can be quite difficult. And do we reach out or do they reach out, when there's the need or scope?

A: Andrew Campbell

For setting up new research, challenging research programs, in a developing country context, I think it is a matter of being creative in finding the right alliances within that particular context. If you know you are up against a policy barrier or an institutional barrier, it is often not very smart to try and tackle that head-on before you have established some evidence base and credibility elsewhere by working around those blockages and strategically developing alliances with relevant interest groups, industry groups and so on.

Unless your research program is completely misconceived, you should be able to envisage some beneficiaries. Try and get them around the table, and involve champions other than the scientists. To have scientists barracking for science is important, but to be super-influential politically you do better by finding those other stakeholders and forming alliances with them. And then hasten slowly. Make sure you have a story to tell before you start trying to knock on doors. Happy to talk further about that over coffee later today.

Q: Alison Bentley, CYMMIT

Andrew, you talk about the importance of resources and timescales to get the job done. How do you reconcile that with funding cycles that are becoming more fragmented and more short-term oriented?

A: Andrew Campbell

It's a very good point, Alison. One of the drivers behind the One CGIAR reform process, was a recognition among the donors that there needed to be longer-term funding cycles and more and longer-term security. But a lot of organisations that are investing aid monies or development aid monies still only have an annual budget from our own governments. It is really hard as a public servant to enter into a funding agreement that is multi-year and long-term when you are making assumptions about and beyond the forward estimates about how much money you might have.

Committing the taxpayer, our taxpayers, to things that go beyond those forward estimates is very difficult. Nevertheless, we try and give as much assurance as we can that we are not stopping funding in the near future. I know my colleagues in Germany and in Norway and in Sweden and in Canada and in the US, and elsewhere, are in the same boat.

But we are trying to come up with an architecture that gives us the confidence and gives the system the confidence to know that there will be resources available in the longer term. There will also be short-term injections. The head of USAID was in East Africa recently, and I expect that will lead to a big chunk of American investment within weeks, and maybe some of that will come into the CG system, obviously not for long-term research but to pay for things that help starving people right now. Yes, you have certainly identified a very important issue, that we need to figure out ways of giving as much funding surety as we can within the constraints of the way in which our budget works. That might be different for other donors like the Gates Foundation that is literally spending their own money, but it is very hard when you are investing public funds.

Q: Joel Fitzgibbon, The Crawford Fund

Despite spending I think nine years in the portfolio, my appreciation and understanding of the processes within ACIAR are not as advanced as most in the room, so I apologise if my question is founded in a little bit of ignorance. First and foremost, ACIAR's mission is food security, but you mentioned climate change on the way through. My question is about mitigation and, in particular, about natural resource carbon capture. I saw you had a fairly large forestry plantation project in Vietnam. To what extent do you or your advisory board factor in mitigation opportunities when you are making decisions about projects? And to what extent,

if any, are you able to leverage projects like that plantation where there must be significant carbon credit opportunities? And how do you capture those opportunities, and do you leverage that into other projects? Or indeed, does that bring down the investment hurdle in some way when you're thinking about a project?

A: Andrew Campbell

Joel, ACIAR has a climate change program. One of the big issues with the climate change program is helping our partner countries to figure out where they sit in relation to what their leaders committed to in Paris, and what that means for the LULUCF (Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry) and agriculture sectors.

The carbon market was aptly described by our Climate Change Research Program Manager [Dr Veronica Doerr] yesterday as the 'Wild West'. I get asked by farmers in Australia, 'Should I sell my carbon?'. And I say, 'No way! You'd be mad in the current situation. I'm certainly not selling mine. You've got "subprime carbon" all over the shop; you've got carbon grifters everywhere, Until we get the governance right to manage this emerging opportunity, then you're far better off just understanding your own footprint, understanding your emissions, understanding your sequestration opportunities, and implementing those that give you co-benefits – i.e. that make sense by themselves without selling carbon.'

If you are doing anything just for a carbon play, in my view you are likely to get your fingers burnt. But that said, we have projects from Fiji to Vietnam to Indonesia to help governments, firms and communities figure out where the opportunities are and where they might be able to put up a credible bid for the green climate funds, for example, that are available, in ways that deliver the co-benefits that justify the project.

I agree with Veronica. It is definitely the 'Wild West' at the moment, and we haven't got the governance right, either in Australia or overseas.

Chair

We need to stop this session now. Thank you, Andrew, for the wonderful presentation. And thank you everybody for the excellent Q&A session.