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The Livestock Revolution: A Pathway from Poverty?

Alexander Downer

Paper prepared for presentation at the “The Livestock Revolution: A Pathway from Poverty?” conference conducted by the Crawford Fund for International Agricultural Research, Parliament House, Canberra, Australia, August 13, 2003

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The Livestock Revolution: A Pathway from Poverty?

OPENING ADDRESS¹

THE HON. ALEXANDER DOWNER

Introduction

I'm very pleased to once again have opened the annual Crawford Fund Conference at Parliament House.

The Crawford Fund, under the very able chairmanship of Tim Fischer, does fine work in ensuring that Australia's agricultural research helps better the lives of millions of people in developing nations around the world. The annual conferences of the Fund provide an important opportunity to discuss key aspects of global development in creative and thought-provoking ways.

THE HON ALEXANDER DOWNER, MP was born on 9 September 1951. He was educated at Geelong Grammar School, Victoria; Radley College, Oxford, United Kingdom; and the University of Newcastle on Tyne, United Kingdom. He has a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Politics and Economics and is a Doctor of Civil Laws (honoris causa). Mr Downer was elected Federal Member for Mayo in South Australia in 1984. He served as Shadow Minister in a number of portfolios before becoming Leader of the Opposition in 1994. Mr Downer stepped down as Liberal Party Leader in January 1995 and became Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs. In March 1996 he was appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs when the Liberal-National Party Coalition was elected to Government. Mr Downer is a member of the National Security Cabinet Committee.

I particularly admire the fact that the debates and discussions are directed towards securing practical outcomes to help alleviate poverty.

This conference, 'The Livestock Revolution: A Pathway from Poverty?' is very much in line with that fine tradition.

Reducing poverty in rural areas and increasing food security are key objectives of our Australia's aid program. I propose to show how livestock is at the very heart of that effort in that it enhances rural development and food security in many developing countries.

Then, more specifically, I will touch upon how we are deploying Australian expertise and leadership in the region to help beef up — forgive the pun — sustainable management of livestock. Finally I would like to make the point that our trade liberalisation efforts can also help livestock farmers in developing countries, by helping them get access to international markets and hence find a way out of poverty.

A tribute to Derek Tribe

But first I must pay tribute to Professor Derek Tribe, who passed away this year. I know his loss will be keenly felt by the agricultural research community in Australia and internationally, and of course by members of Crawford Fund, which he founded.

Derek was a man of vision and conviction. He passionately believed in the role of international agricultural research in alleviating poverty. He was

¹ This is an edited version of the Minister's speech.

also a man of action who worked indefatigably to make his visions become reality.

The improved levels of training and education that flow from the International Development Program that Derek led, and the R&D that flows from investments by Australian agencies such as ACIAR and AusAID in agricultural research, were all part of Derek's vision. What is more, he maintained his commitment, interest and influence until his death.

Derek's life could be summed up in the words of the title of one of his many books — 'Doing well by doing good'. Derek did well and he did good.

Livestock: essential to our rural development and food security efforts

Let me now turn to the focus of this year's seminar, livestock production and poverty alleviation — an issue which Professor Tribe saw as vital in improving the economic well-being of whole communities in the developing world.

As you well know, most of the world's poorest people live in rural areas. Agricultural and rural development are therefore essential building blocks for our region's future. That is why we will be investing some \$255 million in 2003-04 in rural development, mostly in the Asia-Pacific region, and it is why in countries such as Cambodia, Laos, East Timor and Papua New Guinea, we aim our development programs squarely at rural populations.

Our strategy is based on the premise that the best way to reduce rural poverty is through sustainable agriculture and increased opportunities for the rural poor to generate income from farming and non-farming activities.

Livestock is one such opportunity. Driven by increasing incomes in developing countries, the demand for livestock products — meat, egg and dairy products — is increasing at a far greater rate than the demand for staple crops.

The landless rural poor stand to gain from this so-called livestock revolution. Indeed, they derive a great proportion of their wealth from livestock, which often is seen as a real family asset — better than money in the bank. In many less developed countries, livestock accounts for a high percentage of the value of output from agriculture: in India, for example, income from livestock amounts to

30–50% of total farm income and hence is important in alleviating poverty.

We need only look at our own experience to understand the link between economic development and livestock. There was a time when Australia did live off the sheep's back, a time when wool production did provide a badly-needed boost to our economy.

Helping Asia-Pacific countries to make the most of livestock

Building on that experience, Australia is helping to develop sustainable solutions to livestock problems in developing countries in the region. The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research — ACIAR — which received funding of about \$46 million last year for more than 180 research projects across the region, is doing remarkable work in this area.

With help from AusAID, ACIAR-funded projects:

- address animal and fish health, food safety and policy constraints
- improve livestock feed quality and quantity, and reproductive and genetic technologies
- increase the value of livestock and fish outputs
- reduce the environmental effects of livestock and fish production.

One example is a project ACIAR funded to introduce genes from Australian large white pigs from Queensland into the local pig breeds in Vietnam, through artificial insemination centres funded by AusAID. This 'super-pig' project, if I can call it that, resulted in larger and leaner pigs. The economic benefit of these improvements, estimated at \$A500 million by 2010, is going mainly to small-holder pig producers, helping them — dare I say — bring home the bacon.

Let me give another example, a rather dramatic one in that it concerns foot-and-mouth disease, which, as we saw a few years ago, has the potential to cripple global trade in livestock products. ACIAR and AusAID have funded work on diagnosis and control of foot-and-mouth disease in South East Asian countries for more than 12 years — with splendid results in the Philippines, where the project has dramatically reduced the prevalence of the disease.

The importance of trade liberalisation

But aid is only part of the story in helping livestock farmers in developing countries.

We must also help them get access to international markets. While I freely admit this is a pet topic of mine — indeed I could talk about it until the cows come home — I cannot stress enough the importance I place on Australia's trade policies in reducing poverty.

The Doha round of World Trade Organisation negotiations presents a major opportunity for developing countries to secure better trading conditions, and fairer trade rules, that will help underpin development. This is especially the case for agriculture — many of the 100 WTO developing country members are agricultural producers. Protectionism in developed countries hurts poor countries that depend on agriculture for their livelihoods the hardest, including livestock producers. Australia has been at the forefront of trade liberalisation by reducing protection and subsidies. We continue to take an ambitious but pragmatic approach in international forums to champion the interests of free trade — and developing countries — in agricul-

tural products. We will be spending \$31 million in 2003-04 to help developing countries participate in the Round.

In addition, we will be providing tariff- and quota-free access for all goods produced in the world's 49 Least Developed Countries and in East Timor from 1 July this year.

We are leading by example because we believe that a fairer global trading regime is the best way to help the two billion poor in developing countries find a pathway from poverty.

Conclusion

Australia is very conscious of the need to harness the so called livestock revolution to enhance development in the Asia-Pacific region. A conference such as this provides new impetus for this important debate, and thereby advances the development agenda for our region.

I'm sure that the distinguished contributors whose presentations follow will inspire us further in our efforts, as will the memory of Professor Derek Tribe.