



Wilton Park



Image: Albert Gonzalez Farran

Conference report

Empowering people and shaping policies for resilient agricultural and food systems

Monday 7 – Wednesday 9 October 2013 | WP1237

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Executive summary

This conference is the sixth and final in the series on 'Global agricultural, food and land use: the international policy challenges'. Reports from the previous conferences can be found at <https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/reports/?theme=sustainable-development-environment> The aim of this conference was to build on previous discussions to identify appropriate policies at national and international levels and the potential barriers to and enablers of change to deliver a more resilient global food system.

Key emerging themes:

Growing global pressures such as population increases, climatic changes, scarcity of water resources and pressures on land from development, means that increased agricultural production is required. However, this must come from yield increases rather than increases in land use and in ways which do not degrade the environment. This global challenge requires holistic and integrated solutions to provide enough nutritious food to meet future needs.

Discussions focussed around these challenges. Empowering people and changing behaviour was proposed as key to addressing these challenges. This can only be done effectively, however, if the diversity of voices involved in the food and agricultural system are heard, understood and better integrated. Linking the chain better, enabling multi-stakeholder dialogue to occur and creating dynamic food 'networks' as opposed to food 'chains' are also proposed as the best chance to develop productive and efficient networks.

The role of policy in addressing these challenges was felt to be largely about promoting good governance and creating enabling environments for development and progress. This needs to occur at all levels from local to national and international and with a range of actors including governments, the private sector and others. Developing clear priorities for action and effective dialogue with all stakeholders is key to ensuring holistic approaches to shaping policy.

Key policy recommendations

- Regulation and incentives to ensure an efficient, resilient and integrated food and agricultural system and markets which fully reflect the non-financial costs of production. Regulations should not be too onerous however, or they risk driving away much needed investment.
- Policies should be directed towards sustainable intensification; developing technologies to enable greater efficiencies in inputs and reductions in waste.
- Research and development is critical but it must be appropriate and farmer-relevant.
- A holistic approach is required to managing issues in rural areas, including attracting new entrants into farming, improving skills and building confidence with existing farmers and redressing urban bias in key service provision.
- Investment is required in other sectors which impact on food and agriculture such as

transport infrastructure to ensure efficiencies throughout the system.

- Capacity building and development of extension services to move farmers from producing to eat to more business-minded approaches focusing on producing to sell. This will entail a more integrated system, a focus on collective working, operating with a more outward focus and ensuring better linkages in the chain so that all are pulling in the same direction and able to maximise market opportunities.
- Investment in agricultural production value chains or food networks to ensure better integration to strengthen relationships and enable multi-stakeholder dialogues. Enablers are useful in the system to build trust and confidence.
- Focus on understanding diversity in the system. It is important to understand the different barriers and opportunities for change which are relevant to different stakeholders.
- The co-production of information to facilitate common understanding and knowledge transfer is crucial but transfer must be at all scales and in all directions.
- There is need for a comprehensive risk management approach: one that runs throughout the system.

Introduction

1. This conference was about empowering people and shaping policies. Overall, it was about bringing people, science and policy together to develop more resilient agricultural and food systems. It is important however, to recognise that within the categories of people who are central to this, there exists a huge diversity of voices. Working to make sense of these voices and co-ordinating them is an enormous challenge. Food security is partly about distribution but what lies behind this are issues around power and making sense of diversity.
2. Empowering people to be able to develop more resilient agricultural and food systems is crucial. However, empowerment is a complex issue and the challenges involved may be different for different parts of the world. People can in general be empowered in the areas of finance, knowledge, decisions and actions and the barriers of achieving empowerment are largely understood. Challenges of land ownership, distribution, equity and gender for example are areas where policy needs to be directed to enable more efficient systems to emerge.
3. Behaviour change is also an important challenge at all stages of the value chain. Promoting change for self-interest, however, is much easier than promoting working together for wider societal or environmental benefits. This may be a key point in developing policies to meet these challenges.
4. Regulation and incentives are central to addressing the enormous challenges in developing more resilient agricultural systems. Regulations which are often imposed by governments should not, however, be too onerous so as to discourage investment in vital areas. Incentives on the other hand, which could come from multiple sources including government or sellers of agricultural produce, should encourage holistic approaches and more efficient practices without distorting markets or creating dependencies.

Challenges of agriculture and food policies for today and tomorrow

Challenges of changing conditions

5. Likely trends need to be understood and monitored so that future problems can be prepared for and addressed today. Increases in population, for example, has resulted in higher demands for calories and for plant proteins which is set to continue. In addition, it is likely that this will be combined with increases in demand for animal

proteins as populations become wealthier.

6. The demand for land for non-agricultural use is also likely to increase as countries develop and become more industrialised. This has knock-on effects for the outward migration of labour from rural to urban areas and for the expansion of urban land use which is a huge challenge for agricultural production in terms of increasing or even maintaining yields.
7. Food price increases are likely to continue and whilst people can, to a certain extent, adapt to such increases volatility in the market is more difficult to adapt to or plan for. The issue of insurance for farmers and producers against volatility is one which is likely to be further debated in terms of whether insurances should be against price or income volatility and also, who should or could pay for this insurance.
8. Climatic change and more extreme weather is also likely to be a significant challenge for the future. Ensuring agricultural production is adaptive to changing conditions means significant investment in technological innovation as well as knowledge production and dissemination.
9. Problems and solutions to food security need to be seen in a global context. There is a danger otherwise of 'exporting' or exacerbating problems. When diets change as a result of people becoming wealthier for example this can have huge knock-on effects on world markets and land use.
10. Donors who are supporting agricultural production in developing countries, are increasingly putting emphasis on 'impact' which needs to be reported in relatively short timescales which do not match the reality of conditions on the ground and the length of time required for meaningful and embedded change. A longer-term view towards research and intervention implementation is called for.
11. Farming is seen in many economies as an unattractive prospect for new entrants. In some economies, agricultural education has even been dismantled. If this continues, skills and labour will increasingly be lost from rural areas and the security of food and agriculture will continue to be threatened. A holistic approach to these challenges is required in order to engage existing and new farmers and producers and to re-invigorate education and confidence in the agricultural sector.
12. Waste, in both production chains and from retailers, is an increasing challenge which needs to be tackled at multiple levels.

Challenges from around the world

China

13. The challenge and strategy of agricultural development in China highlighted how problems of population growth, rural population transfer to urban areas (in excess of 10 million annually), changes in diets and additional pressures on land use (arable land in China decreased 100 million hectares between the years 2000 and 2011) have led to imbalances in agricultural supply and demand which have resulted in price increases.
14. Despite this, agricultural employment is still important and in the absence of social security, it is a means of survival for many. Agricultural policy objectives in China include increasing overall income growth in farmer households across the country, encouraging new skills and businesses back into rural areas and encouraging the development of technology advancement and farmers' co-operatives to ensure competitiveness.

South East Asia

15. Farmers in South East Asia are amongst the poorest in the world. They have little infrastructure and little access to and power in markets. They also have little access to credit, technology and extension services and have little capacity to make decisions or lobby effectively. Challenges include land-grabbing, pollution and the destruction of soils through intensive farming.
16. Gaining ownership of land is critical to meeting some of these challenges but this takes a strong social movement and is a long term issue. Control over seeds is also critical in these discussions as seed re-cycling is often seen as the only way to ensure a reliable supply in volatile markets. Tensions exist between this approach and getting new inputs (eg hybrid seeds) into the system as many feel this would take away the little control they have (fears around obligations to pay technical fees for example). Interestingly, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea could only develop agricultural production once they had completed land reforms. Poorer countries such Bangladesh and the Philippines are still working through land reform issues.
17. Cambodia on the other hand has witnessed some significant successes in agricultural production where increased organic inputs and reduced water use have resulted in increased yields of 100%.

Main points and policy recommendations

- Debate and policy discussion needs to focus not only on issues of sustainability but also on good governance and an enabling policy context which facilitates the formation and effective functioning of robust and dynamic agriculture and food systems.
- The whole agriculture and food system needs to be well integrated and able to respond to local conditions and the global situation. Bottom-up approaches are required with the active involvement of key stakeholders. There is a need to develop dialogues so that interventions can be directed to what is needed and so that conversations can be appropriate (for example, developing ways to talk to farmers about sustainable intensification in meaningful ways).
- Policies need to be directed towards greater intensification. Developing technologies to enable greater efficiency in inputs and reductions in waste is paramount to these discussions. One challenge is that wastage needs to be investigated at each stage in the chain from production and losses during harvest to waste from supermarkets.
- Further investments and a holistic approach to managing rural areas is required which takes into account not only agriculture but also key service provision and providing opportunities for alternative livelihoods.
- Knowledge transfer is crucial in these discussions of creating and enabling more resilient food and agricultural systems. The transfer of knowledge needs to be at all levels and directions however, so that all parts of the food network have the opportunity to benefit from experiences and apply the learning. The transfer of best practice and techniques works with most impact across climatically similar areas: hence appropriate communication channels need to be established. Transferring knowledge to low-production systems is however more difficult to achieve.
- Ownership of land is highly political and land reform is seen as fundamental to progression in agriculture. Land needs to be guaranteed, inheritable and administered through an independent body. Legalisation/registration of ownership, whilst not necessarily the best asset to use as collateral for debt, remains crucial as it gives farmers motivation to invest. There is a need to work towards improving such long-term issues rather than being focused only on short term impacts.

Empowering people and changing behaviours

18. Empowerment is about finance, knowledge, decisions and actions. A person can be

said to be empowered if they have enough money and related resources to do what they want to do, if they have the necessary knowledge and information, access to relevant decision-making structures and if they are embedded in supportive social, cultural and economic and political structures. Empowerment needs to occur at all levels, from scientists to farmers as each has a great deal of knowledge which should be shared and utilised in appropriate ways. How to co-ordinate and make sense of the diversity of voices involved is however, challenging.

19. There is a need to be mindful that empowering some might dis-empower others. Improving conditions for some farmers might, for example, result in others being put out of business. This is a serious issue in countries where there are few alternative livelihood strategies. Issues of equity and justice therefore need to be considered here and the consequences of empowering one group over another.

Understanding the diversity of voices

20. Groups are not homogenous and the challenges and opportunities for each should be considered in order to build more resilient food and agriculture systems. The distribution of value and risk is a key element. These are considered for different groups:
21. **Farmers in developed countries:** their market position with regards to retailers was seen to be the biggest challenge and how to strengthen this position was a key issue. This will involve improving relationships, mutual understanding and the ability of farmers to negotiate with retailers and food processors. Farmers can in some situations deal directly with consumers which may help to circumnavigate these challenges. Environmental regulations which are seen often as rather onerous can also present challenges to farmers.
22. Opportunities for change are found largely in the organisation and strengthening of supply chains to include all stakeholders including retailers to create opportunities for mutual exchange and understanding. Incentives for co-operative working could create more opportunities for collective marketing, stronger negotiating power, sharing inputs and for managing risk.
23. **Farmers in developing countries:** the major barriers for this group are issues such as ownership of land and weak policies which do not encourage farmers to adapt and up-skill. This lack of confidence or ability to scale-up and adapt to changing conditions means that existing systems become stagnant and young people in particular lose interest in working in agriculture when other opportunities are presented.
24. Improving access to information and to markets together with investment in infrastructure and new relevant technologies would greatly improve opportunities to attract new entrants into farming and to build more resilient systems. Opportunities for land ownership must also be considered as integral to these policies. Building capacity and bridging gender divides could also provide valuable opportunities, alongside educating men on the value of bringing women's voices into the debate. Public private partnerships could have a valuable role to play in identifying and enabling appropriate opportunities for locally-driven development and adaptation strategies (eg in developing ICT programmes). Channels for transferring knowledge and experience from developed countries could also greatly improve opportunities for change and chances of success.
25. **Agricultural extension experts:** a lack of co-ordination between the myriad providers and a lack of a common way of communicating about issues means that information and advice can be contradictory and confusing. Advice is often not well targeted and so may not always be relevant to specific farmers' needs.
26. There is huge potential for co-ordination between experts and extending services to other key players in the agricultural system such as to SMEs with close contacts with

farmers for example. Greater co-ordination is also required across individual services such as joining up ICT initiatives. The main drivers of improvements are likely to come from public private partnerships to provide the mix of policy and private sector training and investment. Raising the value of advice as an input is key and this will entail greater investment in quality and co-ordinated extension services which are targeted to what is required on the ground.

27. **Buyers and food retailers:** competition between big buyers/retailers puts the pressure on prices and drives cost cutting. At the same time, retailers need to respond to changing consumer behaviour such as increased consumption, changing tastes and shopping habits. This provides opportunities for innovation and better linkages through the chain and for ensuring efficiencies. Retailers represent the main entry points for consumers' money and they are ideally placed to strengthen relationships between consumers and producers. They are also pivotal for understanding changing conditions and also for providing good information about products to consumers who are demanding to know more about what they consume.
28. Not all retail is the same however, and there is a role for the informal retail sector but developing this role requires interventions to strengthen the sector such as through better information provision, access to finance and capacity building.
29. **Consumers:** driven by promotion, marketing and the need for food to be cheap which causes challenges for sustainability. Changing tastes and habits are also challenges for producers and retailers and also in terms of health and nutrition. Interventions are required to ensure that good choices are made. Part of this may be about 'choice editing' or providing less choices for consumers, not more so that people are better able to make these 'good' choices. Consumers need to have trust in the system however, to know that what they are buying is what is required to have equitable and sustainable food systems. Labelling helps to a certain extent but is not a panacea as people begin to mistrust them because of scandals such as inclusions of substitutes (horse meat) and 'invisible' products (palm oil).
30. Consumers are however, largely price driven so whether they would make certain choices about sustainable, nutritious and trustworthy food in times of austerity is difficult to judge. It is interesting to consider however, that those who can make those choices and affect the system are likely to be wealthier consumers. Is it then the responsibility of the wealthier consumer to affect the system? Internalising this responsibility will require additional consumer education.
31. **Scientists:** a broad spectrum of people who could be considered scientists was considered to exist within this group. A major barrier to change is the mismatch between short term funding and research opportunities and the reality of on-the-ground intervention which take time to embed. There is a need therefore, for research to be considered in a more holistic and food-system-oriented way, to focus on long-term solutions and risk management strategies. Scientists in addition, are often driven by the need to publish in the short term which does not fit in with the need for longer term research. Research excellence criteria should be expanded to include recognition for applied research and systems solutions. This will require changing attitudes in both universities and research councils.
32. To advance this thinking, a greater use of intellectual property regimes is required to ensure there is recognition for people to invest in different areas and to help research ideas come to market. An increasing trend for partnership working and mutual sharing of information also needs to be built upon such as between private and public sectors and scientists and policy makers; recognising when is the best time to bring these people together is also important. To avoid a narrow focus in these discussions, there is also a need to consider not just agricultural science but science and technology in agriculture and food systems.

33. **Policy makers:** political times-scales and Ministerial tenures are generally much shorter than agricultural time-scales. This results in a lack of long-term planning and cross party agreement in food and agriculture. Food security is not often seen as part of a bigger picture, such as a part of national security considerations. There is a clear need to look at the bigger picture and to achieve cross government approaches to food policy.
34. Rising food prices can provide an opportunity for such changes. Times of crises for example, do help to catalyse people to think about issues in different ways whether that is climate change, rising prices or population growth. Issues do however need to be considered as 'real' and pressing in order for action to happen. The role of policy makers in this is in regulating to define the playing field and in incentivising action economically. Interestingly, it was felt that global leadership may come from those with wide public attention rather than from politicians.
35. There is an increased interest around empowering people through encouraging the growing of food in cities in both developing and developed countries. Further investigation could add to these discussions.

Empowerment and the co-production of knowledge

36. Power relations and issues of vested interest need to be recognised and overcome in order for empowerment to be effective. It is not always in a government's best interest for example, to empower farmers. The production and transfer of ('farmer-friendly') knowledge is key to this debate as farmers need to have good information in order to make good decisions.
37. Facilitating and encouraging co-operative organisations and strengthening existing farmers' associations for example, is crucial to enabling not only economies of scale, but also for sharing information and for the effective targeting of advice and finance. How to motivate people on the ground to realise the advantages of and to provoke self-organisation however, can be a challenge and successful intervention requires an enabler to bring groups and individuals together and to highlight the benefits of doing so. This requires considerable investment and knowledge of local conditions. Priorities for investment and research can however, then be set via open dialogues with farmers which will ensure that decisions are appropriate and implementable.
38. Empowerment strategies need to be tailored to local structural as well as natural conditions as a one size fits all policy is unlikely to work. Need to reflect on what policies might be required for specific groups and also voices within those groups as homogeneity cannot be assumed (such as 'farmers').

Insights from Africa

39. A case study from Kenya highlighted the huge opportunities for empowering local people to adapt to change and to embrace new ways of agricultural production. Farmers here were organised into groups to enable better communications and education of new methods of production. Demonstrations were set up to show farmers the benefits of new inputs and methods and this became the basis of a successful 'farmer field school'. Farmers were able to see for themselves the resulting uniformity of yields which meant they were better able to plan and market around the harvest. Private sector involvement enabled nurseries to be set up near the farmers and initial adopters trained other farmers in travelling workshops to disseminate information widely and in ways which were meaningful and understandable.
40. Another case study of growing sorghum in arid areas, similarly demonstrated the potential for capacity building of agro-dealers so that they are able to offer services to farmers such as supply of fertilisers, machinery, advice, credit and marketing. The focus of this programme is on establishing better linkages of producers to markets and agro-dealers represent a critical link in the value chain. They can for example, offer specific advice to farmers as they are in regular contact with them and therefore

understand local conditions such as soil quality, climatic conditions and common pest threats. Capacity building is complementary to extension services as these are still weak in some African countries.

Empowering women

41. Including women in resource and production decisions could prove very beneficial and this raises questions about what changes in agriculture could occur if women were given a stronger place in it. There are however, complicated social issues to work through in some countries regarding power relations and the organisation of traditional communities. In addition the issue was raised whether men would be displaced by the empowerment of women.

India's experience

42. This case study provided a fascinating example of supporting and organising women at grass-roots. SEWA (Self-employed women's association) is a member based organisation for poor self-employed women, two thirds of whom are from rural areas and 60% are small and marginal famers. This organisation encourages women in business by providing capacity building and education, organising women for collective production and marketing, improving market awareness, providing finance and developing a tools and equipment 'library' to improve production quality and quantity. Agricultural inputs (seeds and fertilisers) are also centralised and provided at affordable prices. 'Master trainers' ensure support is widespread. So far, 200,000 small farmers have been organised and 8000 farmers groups have been formed in fourteen districts in Gujarat.

Main points and policy recommendations

- There is a need to take a holistic view of empowerment and changing behaviours so as not to create further divides and disconnects within the food production system. It is generally easier to empower and change behaviours for self-interest than for public good and developing effective dialogue to promote individual as well as collective benefits will be key to successful endeavours.
- Access to market information is crucial to ensuring that farmers can respond to changing conditions. Capacity building and access to finance and other resources required to be able to respond needs to go alongside this.
- Centralised infrastructure enables farmers to produce without huge capital outlays for tools and equipment and can improve the quality and quantity of products. Working co-operatively also offers many other advantages for farmers.
- Connecting farmers to work together requires capacity building, empowerment and also the development of common languages and ways of talking collectively about issues.
- Peer-to-peer demonstrations and training works well as farmers are generally more trusting of other farmers. This should be complementary to and integrated with wider agricultural extension services.

Linking the food chain better

From value chains to dynamic networks

43. Responding to changing market conditions, taking advantage of opportunities and working towards sustainable intensification requires that agriculture and food production chains are optimised. Stakeholders within the chain need to interact better since effective dialogue is essential for knowledge transfer, for stimulating innovation and for ensuring policies are appropriate and directed to where they are needed.
44. The concept of the Agricultural Product Value Chain (APVC) was introduced. This is a way of conceptualising the process involved in delivering agricultural products and mapping out the actors and actions involved. Each stage of the process adds value and

creates opportunities for entrepreneurs to stimulate innovative activity and co-ordinated change to improve efficiencies, including the uptake of new technologies.

45. The growing need for collaboration between farmers and buyers and retailers is evident in the case of cocoa where there is a gap between current production and demand of at least 1 million tonnes. The possibilities for increasing production or even of maintaining current production through incremental development, particularly by low-intensity smallholders, are limited and holistic solutions are required. Buyer and retail companies are now working with governments, the World Bank, International Finance Corporation and others to increase capacity and create more entrepreneurial production in a sustainable manner. This trend of market transformation is anticipated to continue particularly for crops such as coffee and cocoa.
46. The intensity of interactions within the system determines the quality of decisions and actions. The farmer is central in this system and should be better with other actors to stimulate new discussions. Farmers could for example, usefully talk with scientists to influence research agendas. They could talk with agricultural extension experts to discuss requirements and barriers to adopting advice. Farmers could talk with food processors, retailers and consumers to understand the determinants of changing markets and how best to respond and satisfy those markets. Crucially, there is a role for farmers to have meaningful links with policy makers to help develop appropriate and 'farmer-friendly' policies.
47. Other conversations between actors would also strengthen the chain which can be thought more of in terms of a dynamic network. This approach is necessary to consider the whole system and to determine how it is currently working so that adaptation strategies can be developed to meet future challenges.
48. Other actors in the chain should also engage in dialogue to help create efficiencies in the chain and identify opportunities for risk management strategies. Big retailers for example, are driven by changing consumer demands which impacts on the supply of products. There is enormous potential for such retailers to engage with farmers and to work through co-operatives in particular to ensure lean supply chains. One big retailer for example has developed 'producer networks' through which producers can engage with each other and share experiences. Changing behaviours and expectations is an important part of these discussions as expecting ten different varieties of bread to be available throughout the day is unrealistic and adds to the problem of waste.

Main points and policy recommendations

- There is a need to 'shine a light' on the supply chain to work better with partners to improve efficiencies and reduce waste.
- Invest in food networks to strengthen relationships and encourage and enable multi-stakeholder dialogues.
- Establish a business focus with a common agenda and language across food networks. Enablers can help to establish trust and co-ordinate activity
- Adopt a risk management approach. Identify destabilising influences and conduct gap analysis with the network to identify where investment is needed to reduce risk over time. Seek to share the risk and returns throughout the chain.
- Promote the role of women in agriculture to enable them to become better leaders through capacity building and entrenchment in food networks.
- Communication and education needs to happen at all stages through the system, including educating consumers about waste, nutrition and the effects of changing demands.

Conclusions: summary of priority areas and policy recommendations

49. Discussions highlighted the complexity of food security and the interlinking dimensions

of it which need to be examined both individually and as part of a wider system. Overall, it was concluded that there is more scope to raise incomes than to push down food prices and that policies should be directed towards raising yields rather than bringing more land into use.

50. High food prices represent an opportunity to incentivise farmers and to lock in reforms. Actions and reforms however, may take time to embed. Complicated social issues such as the empowerment of women and land ownership issues will inevitably require longer time frames to change. Donors and policy makers need to recognise this and plan for different time-scales.
51. An overall framework and good governance is required to ensure stakeholders can come together to take a holistic approach to discussing the challenges and devising solutions for more resilient food and agricultural systems.
52. Influences on the shape of individual market sectors include production characteristics, market characteristics, how enabling the environment is and whether there are alternative livelihood strategies for people to pursue. These factors need to be considered throughout the system in order for strategies to be developed to enable sectors to compete on quality and efficiency.
53. Policies to incentivise and regulate for behaviour change and empowering people need to be simple, applied and relevant to different stakeholders in different contexts. Thinking needs to re-focus around a business mentality and concentrate on driving up productivity and reducing waste.
54. Whilst some aspects and specific priorities for developed countries and developing countries may be different, there is some cross-over in that whilst small farmers may differ in size, they suffer from some of the same problems regarding the need to act as co-operatives and the need for affordable finance. The focus in developed countries was felt to be strengthening food networks, more holistic thinking around food and agricultural issues (not tackling them in silos), encouraging new entrants, innovation and entrepreneurialism and investment in long-term, relevant research and development.
55. In developing world contexts, the focus was around making agricultural systems more efficient and strengthening farmers' co-operatives. It was also around capacity building and training and the provision of flexible and affordable finance.
56. Whilst policies need to be directed in context specific ways, there is a clear role for international policy in monitoring and remaining alert to risks, to dealing with cross-cutting issues such as trade-offs and problems spilling across borders. There is also scope at this level for greater collaboration in policies of mutual benefit (for example food safety) and for sharing information and experiences.
57. A final pressing issue was about ensuring that regulatory frameworks and structures which are in place are appropriate to deal with the challenges of the 21st century.

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