

Question Period:

Question:

One very specific question and the other, more general. In regard to the specific question, is the tea sold by 10,000 Villages or YWCA stores in Canada? The second question is something that preoccupied me quite profoundly. I have been involved with non-governmental institutions of various kinds for at least 30 years that have done supportive work, mainly in Latin America. My question is how much of an impact can these small projects have, especially in situations where small farmers are structurally marginalized, where land and resources are in the hands of the large farmers or agricultural corporations? So how do you get beyond local impact into provincial, federal and regional impacts with the kind of excellent work you are doing?

Question:

One serious question and one tongue-and-cheek question. The serious question is the concept of hotspots. I come across that concept in the geophysical science journals. How do you define hotspot? Do you base that concept on a gradual change in climate or do you also include vulnerability of certain socio-economic systems and extreme events? The second question, as a student of science, why is it upon us to be sociable and learn their language. Why can't they learn our language as well?

Question:

My question has to do with what I see as one of the fundamental challenges facing us, food security. If we step back, what role does trade policy play in threats to food security? We see the ruthless criminal means that the banking system used. Are those who are advocating ruthless criminal trade policies having the same impact? Because that exists out there. We know the trade policies they have been trying to promote for quite a while. You open your borders and our food corporations will destroy yours. I don't know how to turn that into a question because DOHA is going to try to get back on the table and I would be interested to see it from your angle.

Question:

I am sure you have heard of GMOs. What is the position with respect to GMOs in South Africa? In Canada, the farmer did not want to use GMOs but someone else used it and it blew onto another farmer's land and then the company wanted to charge him for using it and all that nonsense. It seems like we used to have landlords in the past and now they want to become seedlords. I think this is bothersome. I would like to know the position of South Africa because we need to start fighting it across the world.

Bettina Koelle:

Let me first respond to the question about Fair Trade tea in Canada. There is a small company called Clef des Champs. They are a small tea operators who I think is based in Ontario. They are buying and importing tea directly from the Heiveld Co-op. They are a fair trading company but I want to say to you

all that if you have a fantastic contact that the Heiveld Co-op should contact, please let me know. They are very small organization and I think there is an amazing potential in Canada for the Heiveld Co-op.

I want to add a bit about the whole food security and trade question that goes with it. When we talk about Fair Trade, it is really nearly an oxymoron because trade is quite profoundly unfair. The whole basis of trade is on buying something cheaper than you can sell it for. That is what drives trade. So in a way, Fair Trade is a slightly challenging concept. I think the Fair Trade concept is a very fundamentally value-driven one. It is always challenging to work with because in some ways, the small-scale farmer selling to Fair Trade clients experience things like competition, price discussions and so on. It is a more level playing field but it is still tough. And of course when we talk about food security, there is a strong link to the GMO debate, which is very worrying but I will leave that question to Rhoda.

Then the other question was around the impact of small scale projects and how can they actually have larger scale effects. I think that is question that we are asking ourselves quite often. In some ways, I think, we need to acknowledge that a lot of failures of previous development aid was actually focusing on finding a blanket solution for a bigger area. I am talking even about just a region of a country. That is very diverse. I think we find the diversity not only in South Africa as Rhoda demonstrated, but virtually everywhere. So I want to say that we can think about approaches and methodologies to scale them up on a broad scale but we need to be very sensible and sensitive to not undermine local processes by coming with another solution that might not, in the local context, be a solution. So unfortunately, there is no easy answer to this. If we had a blueprint, and we said take this, it will solve the problem but I really think that it is not realistic. What I want to say is yes, they are small projects but some of these small projects can ripple out quite a lot in terms of the area. A lot of people in South Africa, for example, know about the Heiveld Co-operative and are inspired by what they see to start something on their own, which may not have anything to do with rooibos or Fair Trade but is something to help people in their own local context. I want to say, that small projects are important. We need to see how we can broaden this, but we have to be mindful of the specificity that we are dealing with on the local level.

Adèle Arendse:

I just want to follow on from Bettina on that particular point. Within the work that I do at SouthSouthNorth and working with Indigo, it is relationships and trust are very important. Without that, we can't do anything to help vulnerable communities. It is important to work with those who are closest to the local level, who understand and are sensitive to all of these processes. To some point, I am an outsider working with Bettina in the Suid Bokkeveld. I recognize that and I don't get too involved though I quite like the people and they accept me. It is the case I know at some point, I will leave. But working with people who are there, they aren't going to leave or they won't leave easy. It is a continuous process that needs to happen to help these vulnerable communities get out of the situation they are in. We need to be sensitive to that.

I want to come back to the question of hotspots. I am familiar with the scientific definition of hotspots but in this sense, we have defined them where we overlay the poverty information or poverty proxy

information with different variables of climate impacts. It could be health and health risks related to increase temperature or precipitation. It could be looking at land use changes. The information is there but it is just putting the climate lens on that and working with those people who are modelling using historical data and then putting it on a map to see, visually, where your priority areas for intervention are. This is more what we mean by the hotspots, just to guide you as to where vulnerable people are, what impacts they will experience and what priorities there are.

Rhoda Malgas:

As to the question, why can't they learn our language, I would like to think we should be geared toward a common language that we can all speak. I am just thinking of a graph of data that the farmers had collected. For many people, a graph is not something you would work with everyday but the reason we choose to still use that medium is because we can also try to develop capacity in that direction. We can try to explain to people what graphs are and how they work. I remember the first time I drew a graph in a workshop situation maybe eight years ago. When I talked to one of the farmers afterwards, he said he used to see these things in the paper and he never knew what they were about. For me, this was a testimony to that fact that people are learning our language as well. I guess my message is that we must not always have the expectation that they need to learn our language and to show the same courtesy by learning theirs and engaging to develop a new language we can all learn together that is easy for us all to relate to, whatever context you are coming from or working in.

Bettina Koelle:

I think there was a question about the South African position on GMOs. I want to make it quite clear that the official South African position is quite different than our position and a lot of civil society organizations. Unfortunately, and I will not go into details, there is quite some government support to promote GMOs for various, dubious reasons. A lot of the promotion and the experimentation is happening on the moment at home. There is a lot of activity and activism around preventing that and really having public scrutiny on where these trials are happening, what is going on there and what the impact is on the farmers. Civil society is extremely concerned about the impact of GMOs, especially when it comes to food security. I think there is a really important link. Farmers have been saving seeds for several generations, like elsewhere in the world and I think, especially also in India. There are some countries in Africa, for example, that refuse donations of GMO maize and are punished by the donors, in this case the U.S. South Africa, unfortunately, has a softer stance on this issue. Really concerning it is because GMOs in connection with climate change adaptation has often been abused and promoted as the answer to climate change and the provider of food security. I would like to say that especially when we are talking about food security of small-scale farmers, food security is not the answer. In fact, even worse, as the small-scale farmers produce organic rooibos tea, each time there is an export, they have to sign that they can guarantee that there is no contamination with GMOs in the rooibos. As a farmer, you can't really guarantee this. You don't have an influence over pollinators or other processes that might happen in the ecology. At this stage, we are pretty confident that this is the case but it is of great concern and we are worried about it.

Question:

My question is to do with co-operatives. We do have good examples of co-operatives in India. They are a good answer for small-scale farmers but they are mostly ownership drive. So if the farmers come together by themselves without anyone facilitating them, only at that point do co-operatives become successful. One part of the question is how do you see this upscaling? Two, you have obviously given co-operatives a lot of thought and if I could know your views on the pros and cons.

The second part is Bettina, in one of your slides, you showed a process where projects were long term and then they were short term. In India, we have a certain stage that is called withdrawal. How important is that and how do you look at that in the whole process of the project.

Question:

My question has to do with traditional knowledge. I am interested in what the farmers you work with know about fire management and if they have used fire in the ecosystems in the past? And what kind of things have been learned about their own local knowledge, how rooibos should be grown? Especially the fire, since it is a fire-dominated environment. Have they used it in the past actively?

Question:

My question is about scaling up as well. I spent time in South Africa with a co-operative of school farming villages. I have followed things closely. I am concerned about the larger context, the political context. One of your Stellenbosch profs talked about how South Africa has an incomplete transformation. He was talking about how South Africa is the point country on the continent for capitalism and the other countries are facing the same concerns about South African corporations coming and taking over things in their countries.

In relation to that, there is also a question about the land reform process, which is completely stalled in South Africa. For all of the problems with the Mugabe regime in the north, fast-track land reform did give small-scale farmers, over 20,000 farmers, land in formerly white areas. But in what ways do you see South Africans learning and not being terrified by the lessons of Mugabe, what happens when the whole world dumps on a country and says don't even think about any kind of land reform of that scale.

Question (Dawn Bazely):

We had two scientists on our Brazil panel and they spoke a little bit on the issue of getting academics to move away from their finely-honed focus, knowing a lot about very little. You might comment, Rhoda, about the fact that you have come to an understanding about the importance of trans-disciplinary, what does it mean, the big debate, how is it different than interdisciplinary. In a recent issue of *the Journal of Applied Ecology*, the issue was devoted to navigating the waters between ecology and social scientists. We have just written a rebuttal piece. The fact that within the academy, people, academics are not really rewarded or encouraged to incur the huge cost of working in really truly interdisciplinary teams. I

am looking to you and Bettina. What is the one thing that you would say to your colleagues in your field to encourage them to aim to be broader and more holistic as they do their research?

Bettina Koelle:

The first question was the pros and cons of upscaling. I think it is a very interesting one. When we look at the co-operative movement, it is very diverse and of course in this movement, the Heiveld Co-op is a tiny, minute co-operative. There are co-operatives with 10,000 members or more and interestingly enough, it was something that the Heiveld Co-op decided themselves. They wanted to have a co-operative that feels more like a family, where they are socially accountable to each other. Where they have social control in terms of managing the process and managing the organization.

I want to say that upscaling can be excellent because yes, it brings benefits to a lot more people but the potentially negative aspect is that it can invite alienation of members from the co-op from the organization. They might feel that there is less transparency because how can you really communicate intensely with 10,000 people during informal chats. I am not saying that big co-operatives can't work but I think there are facing a whole different set of challenges. Of course they are much more powerful players in the market and that might create an advantage. I think one needs to look for appropriate set-ups for the situations one encounters. There are not 10,000 rooibos farmers in South Africa.

The other one about the withdrawal process. I think it is a very important question. We are often asked, how do you withdraw from the process you are doing? Remember the different types of boxes? There are different processes. Some of the processes we withdraw from and continue. Some of the processes transition into other processes. But I think when we talk about empowerment and building of trust, we need to understand that we are dealing with very marginalized groups and empowerment is a very slow process. It is a little like planting a tree. It is very vulnerable in the early stages and when the tree grows, it becomes stronger and a little more self-reliant. It is important to step back and let the tree grow by itself, toughen up, develop roots. I think it is also important to support this process wherever we can. Sometimes it is just by introducing the process to our various networks that are very broad. I think it is a way we can make an important contribution. Withdrawal is important but we must also not be unrealistic and say that empowerment can be achieved within a three-year project. I really think it is not possible.

There was a question about land reform in the Eastern Cape as an example and where we think land reform is headed. It is a great headache. Land reform has been virtually come to standstill. There is a 'willing buyer, willing seller' principle that was implemented in the last 14 years. In the beginning of the first election, there was a big emphasis on small-scale farmers and it has really been changed by a policy that supports more 'emerging' farmers, farmers that were previously disadvantaged and are now becoming commercial farmers themselves. This led to a cut in support for small-scale farmers.

Yes, of course, there is a lot of discussion about what happens in Zimbabwe and I think it is not all negative. Some people also say that this is something that is another model. We have a lot of reporting

and connections with Zimbabwe so we also understand that this is a complex and multilayer situation. I don't think that South Africa is heading the way Zimbabwe has headed, but I do think there is some discussion about maybe this 'willing seller, willing buyer' principle not being effective enough to really encourage people to transfer more land to the people who really need it most, small-scale farmers. It is a big debate and I want to say that for the small-scale farmers that we work with, access to land is the most limiting factor. It is a serious debate and we will see.

Rhoda Malgas:

I will respond to the fire question. When I got to know these farmers in 2003, they had a very good idea about fire. In South Africa, especially in the parts where we work and live, the vegetation type is fire prone. Many of the species in that vegetation type are stimulated to germinate or grow because of fire or smoke stimulation. It used to be a practice for farmers to clear the land and burn it. The soil is poor and acidic, it is sandstone. To up the nutrients in the soil, they would burn the vegetation so you have a concentration of nutrients and then you plant the next cycle of rooibos in that same patch. However, scientific studies have shown that unless there is a good follow-up rain that sinks the nutrients almost immediately after the fire, the wind comes up and it blows your nutrients to the guy next door. This is then not going to be of use. It is not sustainable and it is not what you want for your farm.

Through various projects in the last years and especially one of our colleagues has been working with farmers on other projects looking at soil degradation and ways to conserve soil. In the video, the farmer was talking about local knowledge contributions in how they manage fire and manage their own natural resources. I don't know if we have learned new things from the farmers about fire, but they have applied their own knowledge and this has been the more powerful thing that I have borne witness too.

I think the impacts of climate change add now another layer of critical thinking about how to manage fire because if the rains don't come when they are supposed to, if it is hot longer than it should be, you have to manage your fire regime exceptionally well to get the same positive results. I think farmers are becoming more adept at adaptation exactly because they know the nuances to look for. Through the mentor farmer programme, there is a chance to roll out that type of information in a meaningful way for farmers.

Bettina Koelle:

Can I answer Dawn's question? I think the one thing I would say to encourage them is to say that if you would like to make a contribution to improve practice, then you need to engage with a range of stakeholders and partners. I would like to encourage everyone to jump into the deep end and be assured it is an exhilarating adventure. It is not boring, you need to be quite flexible but I also think that if we want to make a contribution addressing complex questions, we cannot afford to remain in our own box and we really need to make an effort.

Rhoda Malgas:

I will talk to you more in the lunch with more detail, Dawn, but I would say that if you are the kind of scientist that doesn't want to do it, then please don't. You might do more damage to those of us who are building social capital and trying to do it the right way if you come in because you are forced. The organic way to do it is always the best option. Our colleague Noel says always start with the low-hanging fruits.

Richard Saunders:

Thank you everyone.