

PREFACE

“From seed to dish, from poor to rich”. This was the title of the speech I gave on behalf of the Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation at the opening of the international conference on ‘*Agro-food chains and networks as instruments for development*’. This one-liner summarises the relevance of the conference to development cooperation. Why are supply chains important for poverty reduction?

A link needs to be made with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). MDG1, ‘Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger’ and MDG 8, ‘Develop a global partnership for development’ are directly relevant when discussing chains as instruments for poverty reduction. Achieving the MDGs is not the sole responsibility of the public sector, however. Private companies have a role to play as well and that is why public-private partnership is a recurring theme in contemporary development policy. It means working together towards common goals and sharing the risks, responsibilities, resources, competences and rewards. Management of supply chains is crucial as it requires co-operation between stakeholders.

The conference provided a wealth of examples illustrating that supply-chain cooperation offers potential advantages compared to buying and selling on the open market. The chapter ‘Food chains and networks for development: lessons and outlook’ contains many recommendations for public and private involvement and also for research derived from these examples.

I would like to draw attention to two broad sets of recommendations related to the donors’ role. Firstly, donors can support the public sector in improving conditions in the chain environment. I am thinking of trade-enhancing aspects such as market organisation, competition policy and the operation of public service-agencies. Donors can stimulate coherence in policy making for instance between trade and public health requirements, to help break down non-tariff trade barriers. Secondly, donors need to contribute to strengthening capacity building and training of smallholder farmers. They could also facilitate third party involvement to encourage trust building and control within supply chains as serious options for further support.

A growing number of donors already contribute to enhancing the business climate, for example by improving the regulatory framework, supporting trade facilitation and compliance with public and private certification and standards. The lessons learned demonstrate that the conference provided a good opportunity to reflect on these policies. It is clear that the exchange of information and the dialogue with stakeholders that took place at the conference offered a valuable opportunity to assess existing policies, sharpen visions and approaches, and provided input for policy making.

However, during the conference it was also pointed out that the above mentioned advantages cannot be obtained without major costs and efforts. Moreover, the achievement of an equitable distribution of costs, efforts and benefits is a major

issue at stake. The editors of this book of proceedings refer to this as 'equitable integration of developing countries' producers into sustainable (inter)national agro-food chains'. The recommendations address the conditions and critical factors required for inclusive agro-food chain development. Nevertheless, they do not fully address the question of how to harness the full potential of supply chains in terms of pro-poor growth.

For development co-operation, however, answering the "how-question" is fundamental, so this is a challenge for all parties involved on the road to pro-poor value chains. Research, training, stakeholder co-operation and information exchange are needed to contribute to future policy recommendations. Perhaps this will be the theme of a future conference. My compliments to Wageningen University and Research Centre for organising this conference, an important step on this road.

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