



Global Donor Platform
for Rural Development

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Bridging the nutrition gap in Africa - Episode 63

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Lee Ann Jackson

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Michelle: What are the issues that keep you up at night?

Lee Ann: What I worry about is this erosion of trust in collective action. I grew up with a father who was a legal scholar. So I have in my head this idea that if you can get institutions right, where you include a common understanding of what the rules of engagement are, there's something around transparency, around dispute settlement, you move a long way towards being able to solve problems collectively. And of course, a lot of our problems really require collective action globally.

Michelle Tang/GDPRD Secretariat: As the Head of the Agro-Food Trade and Markets Division at OECD, what your job entails?

Lee Ann Jackson: I'm the head of a division of about 25 people and we do research on markets and trade in agrifood systems.

We also manage the function of the OECD that's around convening policymakers.

The last piece of work my team does is around standards. I have some long-standing OECD standards that are within my division.

In general, the real role of the OECD is about data and evidence for policy makers. What we're trying to do is both produce the evidence and make sure that it gets communicated in a usable way to policymakers, which we hope leads to better policies at the end of the trail.

Michelle: What are the current global trends in agro-food trade and markets, particularly focusing on how they impact the transformation of food systems and rural development?

Lee Ann: One of the big issues coming at policymakers across the board is how the agriculture and food sector is going to contribute to public goods, like addressing climate change, making sure we aren't destroying our biodiversity, and thinking about the water impacts of agriculture.

What we've noticed in our division's work is, if you're thinking about policies to move the sector into being able to produce more of these public goods, what's the data that's needed?

The trick right now is that there's so much diversity in the measurement and amount of data that's being collected, there's the risk that there may be producers or countries who have fewer resources, and it

makes them less able to engage in this effort of trying to bring the ag and food sector into this delivery of public goods. We have to keep an eye on whether it's disadvantaging parts of the world or certain kinds of producers.

One other quick comment is that technology is advancing so rapidly, and this includes the digital tools that are available around measurement. It's creating the need to make sure that the producers and other stakeholders within agriculture food systems can engage with those tools. That's a question of both skill sets and making sure there are enabling conditions. These include simple things such as Wi-Fi availability so producers can access data on their phones.

Michelle: In your past and current roles, you have extensive experience on the policy side of G7 processes. How do we move the policy around contributing to public goods as you just spoke about onto a global governance level?

Lee Ann: What's shifted over the years is the recognition that to make a change within the agriculture and food sector, you really have to adopt a food systems approach. We're asking the sector to not only feed the world but also be environmentally sustainable and ensure livelihoods for all actors within the food system. And we know the agricultural sector is a big contributor to greenhouse gases and all the things I mentioned earlier.

This shift in thinking about the “triple challenge” means we need to think in sets of policies and instead of individual policies.

Michelle: The food systems priorities of the G7 Italian Presidency are food security, food and finance, and food and climate. What are the opportunities for key public donors to align their work for maximum impact?

Lee Ann: On the macro level, a lot of the scope for enhancing impact is around investments in transparency platforms and in institutions that are building trust.

On the micro level, we can see that there's lots of innovation often at a small scale, particularly in less wealthy parts of the world. The issue is what do we know about scaling up those innovations? From a donor perspective, being thoughtful about investments in enabling conditions, that is the learning environment and the sharing of best practices.

Michelle: What inspired you to become involved with international development work?

Lee Ann: I started out more as a natural scientist, in ecology and natural resources, but then I have a couple of years working at the International Food Policy Research Institute and I worked on a project setting up an initiative called the Collective Action and Property Rights Initiative, and that really convinced me that I was working in a space that was also taking into account people and the decisions that people make and the incentives that influence the decisions.

Michelle: What is the one message you would like our listeners to walk away with and why?

Lee Ann: We need to make sure right now that we're creating spaces where we can have conversations around what needs to change and how to make the change happen. And it's not just to try to convince people, but actually also to be listening to the other perspectives so that you can see where the common ground is.