

Agriculture for Impact London Policy Night

20th May 2015

Old Star Pub

At the 2nd London Policy Night, One Acre Fund (OAF) shared how their work contributes to agricultural development and food security and what lessons and opportunities they offer the new UK Government to expand support in light of the passage of the 0.7% Aid Bill and DFID's forthcoming agriculture refresh strategy. Stephanie Hanson, Senior Vice President, Policy & Partnerships at the One Acre Fund joined Gordon Conway in leading the discussion.

Gordon structured his opening remarks on the general donor environment, setting the context for the evening's discussion: "We are entering an era of strong agricultural support from donors. The 0.7% Aid Bill has now been enshrined in law, making £500 million a year available for aid and agricultural development. An exciting development comes from the Germans under BMZ. Their 'One World- No Hunger' initiative was launched 3 weeks ago in Berlin and will make 1 billion Euros available for agricultural development over the next few years. The European Commission is busily implementing its two year strategy for agriculture, with work on sustainable intensification, resilience and nutrition."

After giving some operational background about the One Acre Fund, Stephanie Hanson went on to explain how OAF are working with governments and donors to influence policy for agricultural development. "We want to share our knowledge to help smallholder farmers. We have operational partnerships with governments in Rwanda and Ethiopia and are also moving into policy and advocacy, in the US and in Europe. We are very new to this space, but because we have learned so much in the field and have thousands of conversations with farmers every day, we can bring that field experience to the policy dialogue. The EU, DFID and GIZ are saying that they want to spend more money on agriculture. We want to help them figure out how to spend it wisely and get a good return on their investment."

Reacting to OAF's presentation about their work, the audience raised important questions about "Who" is responsible for leading interventions for food security. Should it be the governments? The private sector? The NGO's? Who? Whilst OAF is working closely with some governments, for example Rwanda, OAF is not supported by any African government to provide, in the simplest of terms, extension services. In Kenya in fact, the Government actively targets areas where OAF are not operating when offering fertiliser subsidies. The private sectors' provision of similar goods and services to the same populations also seemed uneven, despite an audience preference for their involvement. Clearly, all of these groups have a role to play, but perhaps coordination could be improved to ensure that all populations have access to inputs, finance and education.

In some cases, however, the issue wasn't "who," but "where?" OAF offers credit for purchasing seeds, fertiliser and other useful household items such as solar-powered lamps. They also boast 99% repayment rate. Though, what happens when private companies or other NGO's offer similar services in the same areas? Does this leave certain populations 'out of the loop'? Or does it drive competition amongst the service providers? And what types of outcomes does it produce – either

for the service providers or the beneficiaries? Thankfully, the discussion offered a platform for various actors in this space to make important connections for working through these challenges in the future.

Whether or not these road bumps are overcome, it still begs the question – is this all worth the effort? Ok, it's a hard question to ask and answer, especially for the converted, but an important one nonetheless. OAF participants earn on average \$130 more per year than before. For some, that may seem like a return unworthy of the investment, for others, it may be the difference between enough food for you and your family to eat during the hunger season, or a way to bounce back after a bad harvest provided you opted for micro-insurance in your package. Whichever way you choose to view your glass (half full or half empty), the fact remains that other opportunities are few and far between. Until they emerge, it will be critical to continue to support agricultural development in Africa and OAF offers a strong model creating lasting improvements. Improvements in which DFID will hopefully find merit as it considers how to structure its agriculture and food security spend under the newly elected Conservative Government.