

Paris Panel Paper Launch - Summary

Preamble

The Paris launch of the Montpellier Panel Report, 'Africa and Europe: Partnerships for Agricultural Development' took place on December 2 at the Quai d'Orsay. Dr Jean-Francois Giovanetti from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs introduced the discussion, which also heard from Professor Bernard Hubert, President of the Agropolis International Foundation, US Ambassador for Food Security, Patricia Haslach, Sir Gordon Conway, Montpellier Panel Chair and Dr Ramadjita Tabo, Panel member and Deputy Director of FARA. Apologies were received from Mr Henri Carsalade, Panel Member and Mr Sujiro Seam, Head of Food Security and Economic Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs who could not be present due to the adverse weather.

Professor Bernard Hubert opened the discussion, stating that in order to achieve global food security we need cooperation between individuals and organisations. Intercultural cooperation is necessary both to offer an African research perspective, but also to understand the different needs of Africans. A greater diversity of products and production systems is required because the model in Africa is different to the one found in Europe. Capacity building is critical in this regard, continued Professor Hubert, and the focus should not be just on PhDs, but also on significant extension building. Africa only has three principal staple crops – more diversity is necessary to reduce dependency, and its associated problems.

Sir Gordon Conway congratulated France on becoming the home of the CGIAR Consortium office, based in Montpellier. France would be able to offer their skills, experience and intellect to the newly reformed CGIAR. He discussed the factors that had contributed to the need for the creation of the Montpellier Panel and the publication of its report. These included the food price spike of 2007/2008, followed by the second spike in 2010, which had hit developing countries hard. Second was the G8 L'Aquila meeting which resulted in a pledge of \$22 billion towards food security. The EU had been the first to respond by committing \$1 billion to an emergency facility. The US government had also begun to take a strong lead in food security creating the Feed the Future programme with its commitment to helping smallholder farmers. In Africa, the success of the CAADP programme, with 22 African countries as signatories, encouraged optimism in Europe and the developed world. The intention of the Montpellier Panel was to create a high level group with both European and African members, which would aim to influence donors and policy makers.

The report emphasises the importance of agricultural development in development as a whole, and Sir Gordon explained the concept of a 'virtuous circle', driven by agriculture, that impacts on all sectors of an economy and is the catalyst for economic development. In order to achieve this process, European donors need to increase the amount they give and have a coherent set of individual policies that fit together. Sir Gordon concluded by highlighting how Africa has a real chance of gaining food and nutritional security, and there is an opportunity for European actors to partner with Africa to achieve this success.

Dr Ramadjita Tabo provided an African perspective, noting how agriculture accounts for 80% of the continent's labour and 60% of its GDP; two out of three African citizens depend on it for their livelihood. However, there are many challenges to address, particularly in agricultural investment that has been somewhat neglected. He emphasised the need to look at the positive trends and build on these to make improvements. The CAADP constitutes a strong framework which stakeholders can support to progress improvements in African agriculture. He also highlighted the work of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), which is playing a significant role in Africa by investing in key geographical areas and value chains.

Dr Tabo felt that with the correct mechanisms in place and with Africa and Europe working together, we could make a significant difference. Access to available technologies is a considerable limiting factor in progressing African agricultural development; furthermore, the inability of many farmers to gain access to credit is a key constraint.

Sir Gordon also highlighted the importance of closer partnerships between Africa, Europe and the US, citing the success of the US 'Feed the Future' project as an example. This offered the possibility of more integrated programmes, involving governments and various donors. He discussed several topics found in the panel report. Price volatility is very damaging to the developing world; this year's second food price spike offers cause for serious concern. The report strongly recommends stronger regulation of commodity markets and the need for a discussion of the possibilities of using regional grain reserves and special World Food Programme reserves to mitigate the damage caused by price volatility. He recognised the criticisms of this proposal, but recommended it should be investigated further.

The key elements of chronic hunger also need addressing, he continued. Child nutrition has gone down from 27% to 24%, which is promising although more needs to be done. We need to look through the lens of the '1000 Days' initiative. If a mother does not receive the correct nutrients during pregnancy, or if the child is not fed properly before the age of two, that child will suffer from the irreversible effects of under nutrition. He also emphasised the need for scaling-up of local small-scale successes. Here he highlighted the importance of working, and partnering, with the private sector. Only the private sector can work on a significant enough scale to provide demonstrable benefits, so their knowledge and understanding is critical to taking small-scale successes forward. Knowledge from the private sector can be partnered with European knowledge to create a resilient, secure food system.

Ultimately, he concluded, the key is not to try to dictate what should be done, but to offer general policy directions for change. In the future the Panel is looking to create a number of two page briefings, on specific topics, to give guidance and direction in certain areas.

Ambassador Patricia Haslach concluded the Paris event by noting the optimism that the Montpellier Report features. She cited the 'virtuous circle' of agricultural development

but noted the importance of a global commitment, emphasized in the Report, to ensure the foundations for such a process are created. Furthermore, part of the solution lies in ‘not repeating the mistakes of the past’, and she discussed the importance of ‘African-led’ efforts, and their recent successes through initiatives such as the CAADP, the Alliance for a Green Revolution (AGRA) and individual country policies and plans. She further recognized the importance of these progresses, and noted how the joint statements and communiqués that arise from such ‘business meetings’ are ‘commitments to implement the Rome principles in a tangible way’.

Ambassador Haslach discussed the ‘Feed the Future’ (FtF) initiative, and further echoed many of the Montpellier Panel’s points. The overarching objectives of FtF are to sustainably reduce poverty by raising the incomes of the rural poor, and reduce the number of people suffering from under nutrition. It embraces a comprehensive approach that addresses all four components of food security: availability, access, utilisation and stability. Access – the ability of people to buy food – is key. At the heart of the initiative is the idea that broad and inclusive economic growth is the only way to reduce poverty and hunger. Therefore, a major focus of Feed the Future is involving and partnering with the private sector – because only the private sector can create broad and inclusive economic growth. But it is governments, she continued, that must create a sound ‘enabling environment’ and ease the costs of doing business for the private sector.

Ambassador Haslach was pleased that the panel also endorsed another key L’Aquila component – development of the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP), the multi-donor trust fund for agriculture projects. She concluded her presentation by further agreeing with the importance of two specific programmes highlighted in the Montpellier Panel Report. Firstly, she noted the importance of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and of agricultural research. The second initiative she cited was the ‘critical window’ publicised by the ‘1,000 Days: Change a Life, Change a Future’ organisation which highlighted the importance of preventing under nutrition during the crucial 1,000 day window from the start of a mother’s pregnancy until a child is two years old.

Discussion

Throughout the Montpellier launches, we have gained from the discussions at each event and the valuable feedback from the wider development audience. An example of this feedback can be found below, and was taken from the Discussion at the above event.

In the discussion the primary focus was the lead that France, as President of the G20, was planning to take on the issue of food price volatility. France intends to focus on three elements needed to reduce price volatility:

1. Increase market transparency,
2. Implement stock policies so that we know where stocks are when prices begin to rise and how to deal with them, and
3. Develop insurance policies for countries hit hard by volatility.

This approach was welcomed. Other elements were also discussed including the stronger regulation of commodity markets, the prevention of export bans, the location of strategic grain reserves and improved post-harvest handling and storage. Some of those present further suggested it would be timely and valuable to extend the G20 discussions on price volatility to embrace the key issues of increased agricultural productivity and food security generally.