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Getting Your Assumptions Right

TONY RINAUDO

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Our assumptions about a problem will influence our expenditure, choice of interventions and ultimately our success. It is very important to get our assumptions correct — and to be flexible enough to adjust them as required as new information comes to light. In the early 1980's, Niger Republic was in the grip of desertification which threatened the livelihoods of it's inhabitants. The default response of both state and non-state actors was to mount massive tree replanting schemes. The approach failed socially, technically and economically and by the late 1980's, appetites for land restoration through tree planting had largely disappeared. Identifying the technical gaps and addressing the real constraints - lack of tree ownership, theft of trees and false perceptions about trees - preventing people from restoring tree cover — opened the door for a spontaneous, wildly successful social reforestation movement.

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What Is the Flavour of Good Intentions?: On Interest Divergence and Responsibility in the Cacao-Chocolate Industry

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In recent years, the cacao-chocolate industry has increasingly focused on taste - quality of flavour and the ability to discern quality - as a vehicle of market differentiation. At the same time, many of the marketing tools of specialty chocolate rely on linking good taste to social and economic goodness. The links among these elements remain blurry, are not yet clearly defined by specialty cacao or chocolate producers, and often rely on interpretations of work from related but different industries. A critical examination of the value chain indicates that the interests of those who produce chocolate frequently diverge from the interests of those who produce cacao, creating gaps and traps in work on social and environmental responsibility. The often contrary goals that impact the industry must thus be interrogated to determine the place of sustainability, and in whose best interests different players act. We must ask: what is the flavour of good intentions?

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Sustainable Food System and Job Creation under Water Scarcity

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Agri-food systems in the DryArc region (between Southern Europe, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and China) face a complex combination of challenges including water scarcity, rainfall variability, increased temperatures, land degradation, desertification, high population growth and migration, widespread poverty, malnutrition and unemployment. This region is expected to be among those worst affected by climate change, where reduced agricultural productivity, increased poverty, higher dependence on food imports, and increased competition for scarce natural resources will ultimately threaten the viability of agriculture and rural livelihoods. These constraints also present opportunities to transform agri-food systems across the DryArc and scaled in the frame of the diverse range of the region's agro-ecosystems: rainfed, irrigated, agro-pastoral and desert farming. Synergies across these agro-ecosystems can be leveraged among SDGs related to nutrition security, Natural Resource Management (including soils and water) and rural development, provided the potential of the agro-biodiversity is fully utilised and properly managed. This agro-ecological transformation of fields, farms, landscape, value chains and policies will be illustrated in the cereal-based agri-food systems of the DryArc region, showing the key role that food legumes, forages, livestock and trees can play in long-term sustainable use of water and soils. The implications for water, land and labour productivity under climate change and its effects on livelihoods of the people across this region is a critical part of this discussion, informing the future direction of research for development in the context of the CGIAR's DryArc initiative.

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Filling Gaps and Removing Traps in the Use of Voluntary Sustainability Standards

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Voluntary or private sustainability standards cover a large number of tropical products and are increasingly important in global markets. The rapid spread of voluntary sustainability standards is sometimes erroneously interpreted as a sign of increased sustainability in the food system. Yet, the actual impact of such standards matters. There is a potential trap that private standards satisfy consumers' demand for more ethically and sustainably produced food products and fulfil companies' sustainable sourcing strategies while not actually contributing to improved sustainability in global food systems — thereby merely easing consumers' conscience, diverting donor money to certification programs and extracting rents from food supply chains through expensive monitoring systems. Despite substantial research efforts on this topic, important knowledge gaps remain to be filled. This presentation highlights the results from recent research on the sustainability impact of voluntary sustainability standards, with evidence from different tropical countries and sectors. The presentation includes a focus on all three components of sustainability, including social, economic and environmental issues and sustainability trade-offs. The research findings, along with earlier findings described in the literature, entail important implications towards farmers, food companies, standard-setters, policy-makers, donors and consumers on how to avoid the above-mentioned trap of widespread use of private standards without actual improvement in food system sustainability. Finally, the presentation points to some remaining research gaps that need to be addressed in order to develop a more effective system of private standards.

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Scientific Knowledge Transfer and the Science-Policy Interface: Bridging the Gaps and Overcoming the Traps

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Scientific knowledge transfer and the science-policy interface is complex and challenging. It includes contestations about the credibility and legitimacy of scientific knowledge and the strategic use of such knowledge. The cognitive distance between the scientists and science experts on one hand and the policy making institutions on the other, enhances the complexities. In addition, the willingness of scientists to engage in knowledge transfer and exchange with policy is often related to individual capacities, level of training and career trajectories, and motivations. These realities often hamper the successful knowledge transfer between the spheres of science and policy-making leading to under-exploitation of the potential for science to support decision-making. The policy-science interface is further compounded by the fact that policies often address complex, far reaching and large-scale, multi-faceted problems that present social, institutional as well as natural resources contexts. To be more effective many policy makers would need to develop scientific competences to interact more effectively with scientific experts. The policy-making process is politically-driven and involves various arms of government. Interest groups and lobbyists with different points of view are often involved. Scientists need to enhance their level of knowledge of the internal workings of policy-making processes. Once policies are enacted, there often is a lack of coordination among agencies responsible for implementing policy and this contributes to fragmentation. This presentation presents insights on the possible strategies that can fill the gaps and remove some traps in the science-policy-practice continuum for sustainable resources management. They include processes of public participation; a definition of intended outcomes; the theory of change; determination of policy anchors and enablers; as well as provisions on measurement of the transformational impact of a policy. The insights presented are drawn from recent publications on this topic as well as from practice. Inference is drawn from the Kenyan Agriculture Sector Transformation and Growth Strategy (ASTGS). This 10-year strategy supports policies that address food and nutrition security while embracing sustainable exploitation, utilisation, management and conservation of the environment and natural resources.

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Crop and cropping systems

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