

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

23 October 2015

To whom it may concern,

Re: The role of development partnerships in agriculture and agribusiness in promoting prosperity, reducing poverty and enhancing stability in the Indo-Pacific region

ChildFund Australia welcomes the Committee Inquiry, and the opportunity to contribute to this important policy discussion.

ChildFund Australia is an independent and non-religious international development organisation that works to reduce poverty for children in the developing world. The organisation implements programs with a range of local partners in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea and Vietnam, and manages projects delivered by partner organisations throughout Asia, Africa and the Americas. Our work is funded through child and community sponsorship, as well as public donations and government grants.

ChildFund Australia is a member of the ChildFund Alliance – a global network of 12 organisations which assists more than 15 million children and families in 58 countries. ChildFund Australia is a registered charity and is fully accredited by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

The following points are recommended for the Committee's consideration. We would be pleased to elaborate on these points if the Committee requires clarification or additional information

The need for micro-economic stimulus for small scale business enterprises

Most of the world's poorest families are dependent on small scale business enterprises, such as small scale agriculture and livestock management. It is vital that these small businesses are given the opportunity to grow, gain access to assets, achieve access to markets, are provided with safe environments to operate, receive support and incentives. If attention is not given to the micro-economies in poor countries, impoverished communities risk being left out of the economic growth cycle altogether.

As private sector organisations become more involved in aid delivery projects, it is vital that they play a role in stimulating micro-enterprises in the regions in which they work, in the same way that they generate increased middle and large scale enterprise.

The use of innovative partnership models and agricultural practices

In ChildFund Australia's experience, innovative partnership models and practices in agriculture can successfully contribute to supporting agricultural development and promoting inclusive economic growth. In Papua New Guinea ChildFund is currently implementing a number of projects in

partnership with the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) and the Department of Agriculture and Livestock (DAL) to promote nutrition and reduce poverty in remote districts of Central Province.

Through one initiative, the *Enhancing Food Security and Improving Nutrition in Communities and Schools* project in Rigo District, ChildFund is partnering with local authorities to support 12 climate vulnerable communities to enhance their food and nutrition security via more innovative and climate-smart farming knowledge, skills and practices. This has been initiated via backyard farming activities, empowering key farmers with seed capital and fostering shared learning sessions to enhance food security through increased production.

The project borrows from an innovative US National Science Foundation change model¹ (see below) successfully implemented by USAID in countries in Africa. The model prescribes working with local institutions and introducing specialist knowledge to complement existing knowledge and enhance current and future adaptive capacities. When communities own this process the feedback loop becomes perpetual and continuously improves the community's adaptive capacity.

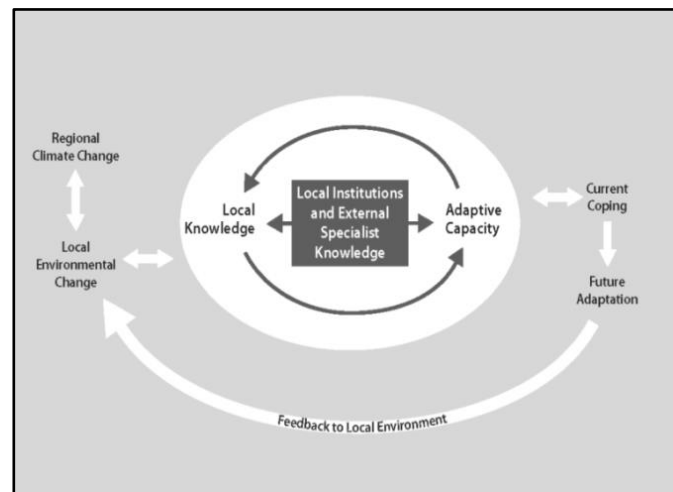


Figure 1: A change model of strengthened adaptive capacity influenced by local knowledge and specialist inputs.

The project has assisted communities to identify the constraints to indigenous farming practices, provided training to farmers on innovative backyard farming techniques, and promoted improved varieties of local crops to effectively assist adaptation to weather and to environmental alterations brought about by climate change. As a result, more than 122 backyard gardens have been established and more than 10 farmers have established medium-sized commercial farms which are able to produce enough produce to supply hotels and supermarkets.

Furthermore, five partner networks have been established with other agricultural entities using the model above.

The establishment of Women's Livelihoods Groups

Although female farmers produce more than half of the world's food, and work two-thirds of the world's working hours, women receive less than 10% of the world's income and continue to be

¹ Local Knowledge & Climate Change Adaptation Project (LKCCAP) theory of change, US National Science Foundation (US NSF)

denied access to land and resources.² Barriers to women's economic opportunities in the Indian Ocean Asia-Pacific include: unequal gender relations manifested at the household level in relation to family decision making; community norms which prioritise boys' education and vocational training over girls'; unequal control of family income.

Partnerships by development agencies with women's unions, groups and collectives is a proven approach to enabling women to achieve improved household incomes and growth of micro-businesses.

In Laos ChildFund Australia has addressed these barriers and enabled women's economic empowerment through the establishment of Women's Livelihoods Groups. The *Improving Gender Equality and Livelihood Security* project in Nonghet District, Xieng Khouang Province, has established several Women's Livelihood Groups to increase the capacity of women to plan, lead and manage livelihood initiatives. Through the project, ChildFund, in partnership with the Gender and Development Association, women have been provided with training and support in the areas of management, leadership, communication, income generation and small business development. As a result, a number of women have successfully set up small businesses in selling sweets and been able to engage in livelihood activities for the first time.

Women have also received training on how to improve gender equity within their households and communities by distributing household responsibilities and workloads and learning about equitable decision-making processes through the project. As a result, gender household relations have improved with women becoming more confident to participate in activities outside the household and husbands becoming more supportive of their wives' participation in these activities.

The promotion of youth involvement in agricultural activities

Many countries in the Indian-Ocean Asia-Pacific region have a high percentage of young people. For example, in Cambodia 56 per cent of the population are under the age of 25. However, lack of waged work available in local communities to support the huge youth population has forced youth to find jobs in the informal sector and has exposed them to poor working conditions and risk of exploitation.

In Cambodia, ChildFund Australia has responded to these issues by facilitating the establishment of youth groups, which have provide opportunities for youth to engage in agricultural income generating activities. To date, over 2,000 young people have been provided with training and skills in sustainable agriculture techniques, such as vegetable production, small animal raising and the use of organic fertiliser as well as support to start up their own small businesses.

Youth group members have successfully applied the skills and knowledge in agriculture they have learned at home to increase their food production and improve nutrition levels in their households. The youth group members have had opportunities to sell surplus vegetables and poultry locally, reporting earnings of up to USD30 per month. Youth group members have also helped to address youth-related problems in their communities such as drinking, violence and gang activity which has

² Gender Equality, Oxfam Australia, 2014.



resulted in communities becoming safer and more stable as a result. Thus, these successes demonstrate the economic and social benefits of involving youth in agriculture activities.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry. We look forward to Committee's findings and recommendations. If you require further information please do not hesitate to contact me or ChildFund Australia Communications Manager, Larissa Tuohy.

Yours sincerely,

Nigel Spence,
CEO
ChildFund Australia