

Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation

Economic and Business Conference

4-5 July, 2013, Mauritius

Co-chair introduction to Session 3: Creating agri-business linkages, addressing food security and sustainable development

As you will be aware, Australia will have the honour of taking over the Chair of the IOR-ARC, and I have appreciated the opportunity of seeing the IOR-ARC in action today, and in particular, want to acknowledge the role of India and our hosts, Mauritius, in making this event possible.

Being here helps remind me that Australia is a two ocean nation: both the Pacific and the Indian Oceans. I am also reminded that when Australia campaigned for a seat on the UN Security Councils – and we greatly appreciated the support we received in that regard – we emphasized our commitment to having the views of small Island states fully represented at the Security Council. We intend to carry through on that commitment.

Last night I heard it said of Mauritius and others that they are not so much “small Island” states, but “big ocean” states. But whether we are “small Island” states, or “big ocean” states, or neither, we all have to address and overcome similar challenges. We all have to create jobs, to lift people out of poverty, diversify our economic base, harness new technologies, develop clean and renewable sources of energy, improve our workforce skill levels, connect to the world outside, and provide food security.

The United Nations’ food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates that around 870 million people experience hunger every day.

In many Indian Ocean Rim countries, the impact of increasing climate variability on food and water security is a critical issue. Climate change is an existential threat for many small Island developing states. Australia has tried to shape our policies and programs to help small Island states respond to that existential threat.

Australia can and does help. Small Island states were given the highest priority in the allocation of Australia’s climate change fast-track package. Coral reef management is a matter where we have particular expertise, and pressing concerns. Our assistance to many countries of the Indian Ocean region targets climate change and the sustainable provision of clean water. A number of our projects with IOR-ARC are at the junction of oceanography and meteorology. They help to record and track fish stocks. They assist in predicting shifts in

weather patterns. They give us a more solid scientific understanding of how our ocean works and how we can make the blue economy of the Indian Ocean work for all of us.

There is potential to advance food security co-operation through land and ocean based solutions.

IOR-ARC can build on larger global forums through the leadership of key member states.

Sustainable agricultural development, including fisheries and forestry, is key to improving food security, and Australia has a great deal to offer and great potential to contribute to food security in this region.

In 2012-13, Australia's official development assistance in food security was approximately \$409 million – a two percent increase from 2011-12.

Nearly three-quarters will be spent in bilateral programs, with a strong focus on Africa and East Asia, including IOR-ARC member countries.

Our food security co-operation through IOR-ARC centres on seasonal climate forecasting, ocean forecasting, and climate change adaptation, including:

- A two million dollar initiative to improve climate forecasting, led by Australia's CSIRO, which aims to support farmers, industry and policy makers in India and Sri Lanka to make more effective use of seasonal climate forecasts;
- Projects/workshops on ocean forecasting and climate change adaptation; and
- Building capacity of the Water Division of the Southern African Development Community to more effectively develop and govern trans-boundary water resources, with seven African IOR-ARC countries benefiting.

Research shows that GDP growth originating in agriculture can be up to four times more effective in reducing poverty than GDP growth originating outside the sector. Australian support for agriculture includes:

- \$11 million over four years to help around 35,000 farmers in the border region of India, Bangladesh and Nepal to produce more food with less water;

- The CSIRO partnership with Biosciences Eastern and Central Africa (BeCA), which aims to mitigate risks to agriculture and rural poor. BeCA member countries include the IOR-ARC member countries of Kenya and Tanzania.
- The Africa-Australia research partnership, \$20 million, implemented by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), which is focused on more resilient and productive cropping systems in ten African countries, including Kenya, Mozambique, and Tanzania.

Australia is committed to improving food security. We welcome initiatives that will reinforce the food security work of other multilateral institutions, particularly the G20, FAO and APEC.

Australia advocates a comprehensive approach to address food security. This includes:

- Emergency assistance and longer-term protection for the most vulnerable;
- Increased focus on agricultural production and distribution;
- Increased investment in agriculture, including research, development and agricultural extension; and
- Appropriate economic and trade policies and open and efficient markets to maximize food trade flows, locally and internationally, together with good governance.

Australia is committed to reforms to improve the international food security architecture. We are working through the G20 Agricultural Market Information System to foster more effective sharing of market information.

The reform of global agricultural and food markets remains a key challenge to improving food security. Australia's priorities include the reduction of trade-distorting subsidies, and the elimination of tariff and non-tariff trade barriers.

Australia's extensive partnership with IOR-ARC members in the important area of food security and sustainable development is a strong partnership that we can strengthen further in the years to come. I have come here to listen and learn how best to progress our partnership. None of us alone has all the answers, but together we can build a more secure and sustainable future. I look forward to hearing your valuable contributions.

Thank you.

KELVIN THOMSON

AUSTRALIA