PEACE THROUGH DEVELOPMENT: HOW CAN AUSTRALIA HELP?

Stein W. Bie

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Dr Stein Bie joined the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR) in 1997 as Director-General. A Norwegian citizen, Bie came from the Sustainable Development Department of FAO in Rome, where he was Director of the research, extension, and training division. Before joining FAO, he was Director of the Norwegian Centre for International Agricultural Development of the Agricultural University of Norway. Bie has wide experience with university, research, and non-governmental institutions and organisations. Originally educated in agricultural science from Oxford University and in animal and human nutrition from Cambridge University, he subsequently served as a project coordinator with the Netherlands Soil Survey Institute in Wageningen, and the Netherlands Geological Survey, to create the first major natural resource information system there.

Peace Through Development How Can Australia Help?

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Australia is a country of internationally high living standards in a sea of underdevelopment. History made it that way, and the Australians did their homework. I come from a country that is about as far away that you can get, Norway, yet Australian willingness to work for peace and justice internationally has not been questioned there for almost one hundred years. Australia has made major human sacrifices to keep the global peace, and Australia has been a major contributor to the global food basket. The papers this morning recognise a historic willingness by Australia to continue to participate on military and food security issues.

They also recognise that the challenges now are different from the time of the two world wars, and the wars in Indo-China. Global political power is no longer an obvious focus for conflict. Most conflicts are local; in fact most of them are internal rather than between nations. Most conflicts are fought by irregular groups, not armies. Many conflicts are loot-seeking conflicts, even if they are occasionally shrouded in justice-seeking arguments. Whilst in the past a common loot was 'the people', the most common loot fought over now belongs to the family of natural resources—the loot is fish, diamonds, water, fertile land, drugs and crops. The irregular armies no longer receive their weaponry from official or clandestine government sources but buy them in a private arms market. These are bands of rough people or people led by rough people who have not heard of the Geneva convention, who scarcely recognise a Red Cross or a Red Crescent, and whose aims are not to win the minds of people, but to get the diamonds, the fish or the raw heroin. Clearly there are also more classic conflicts around, and there will continue to be. The disturbing development is, however, that piracy on land, and to a lesser extent on the seas, is growing dramatically, and that civilians constitute the main victims.

The papers this morning have carried messages of realisation that, in addition to more conventional conflicts for which the Australian Defence Forces are normally trained and employed, there is a global epidemic of new loot-seeking conflicts, gruesome at the local level, and sometimes developing into a scale that engages the global community (such as that in Sierra Leone and East Timor), and therefore also Australia.

As an agricultural scientist I have little to contribute to thoughts of prevention of large-scale justice-seeking conflicts. I do have a conviction, however, that the current and medium-term agricultural production figures can yield enough food for most people to avoid a large-scale food war. I do believe China will largely feed China, and that China will continue to both sell and buy food, and will continue to be a food trading partner with Australia. It will continue to be a major purchaser of Australian agricultural commodities, and presumably on fair trade terms. There are problems of the purchasing power at household level, but there is not a question of massive food aid. The growing world population needs more food, for sure, but the message that I also get from this morning is that agricultural science holds a reasonable promise that, given reasonable investment in the research, it will be able to produce the increased food required, in a significantly more sustainable and environmentally-friendly manner. I also sense that there is no precondition that all this has to be done by introducing genetically modified crops and animals on a large scale, and certainly not in developing countries.

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Australia, unlike many other industrialised countries, has an environment and an agricultural industry which are more relevant to developing countries than those of others. There is probably more known in Australia about sustainable use of natural resources than most other places. Programs with a lot of people's participation, such as the Australian Land Care initiative, is arguably most relevant to neighbouring developing countries striving to produce food in an economically and ecologically sustainable way. Australian experience is therefore important, and knowledge generated in Australia is a potentially important tool for Australia in building better relations both with its close and more distant neighbours.

An important point was made this morning, namely that security goes much beyond military security. Keeping law and order is just a prerequisite for real development. Whilst security forces and law enforcement must be there, so must many other ingredients be brought in place. In the rural world rural knowledge is the long-term answer. International agricultural knowledge, whether generated in Australia or together with

Australia's international partners in research, is arguably one of the most important ingredients in providing stability.

Another point that came through very clearly this morning is the changing nature of conflict. If a significant number of conflicts have their roots in loot-seeking rather than justice-seeking, then the frequently very costly policing of looters is at the tail end of a vicious chain that can be more cheaply broken earlier than by intervention of security troops. The bands of bandits who roam towns and countryside, although recruited by the rich, are themselves most often very poor, in need of employment, and with little hope, whether their roots are in the countryside or in the cities. In countries that are predominantly agricultural, it is the failure to sustain and increase productive agriculture that forces them off the land and into even grimmer situations in the urban slums. The child soldiers are becoming a fact of life, and the indiscriminate maiming and slaughtering of civilians are not undertaken by regular armies. So many, but not necessarily all, conflicts have their recruitment base among the discontented young. Many developing countries have shown how agricultural productivity can be sustainably increased and form a base for development, spreading improved food security and increased living standards to many.

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Australia is well advised to analyse this new pattern of conflict, because there are countries close to your shores, where it is happening. Australia has shown the world with its UN and Indonesia-agreed intervention in East Timor that it has a mastery of the security operation. It has followed it up with civilian actions, where the military has also been credibly involved. All these operations are risky operations, also to Australians. The conflict in East Timor had many of the traits of those of Somalia and Sierra Leone, but did not become one. Lessons have been learnt. But there is another question: do such conflicts need to arise at all, or go that far? It is immeasurably cheaper and with zero risk to life to introduce new higher-yielding varieties of crops, find appropriate soil fertility measures, introduce a veterinary service, work on erosion control, improve water efficiency in irrigation systems, and support the building of efficient agricultural marketing, than it is to send an expeditionary force. The introduction of such services, and again Australia has so much of the knowledge, and research capability, costs only very moderate amounts. The military capability may always need to be there, so there has been no suggestion this morning of turning swords into ploughshares. Instead there has been a plea for a realisation of where the evil begins and who, because of rural and also urban poverty, will be using those guns and those machetes.

In my view few other countries are in a better position to draw obvious conclusions on the new conflict issues than Australia. You have the agricultural knowledge base, you have a strong international network of research, both in the public and private sectors, and you have a military that has acquitted itself in an exemplary fashion as the sword behind the door. The message from the researcher to the admiral this morning was clear: you appreciate better than most that a holistic approach to peacekeeping and conflict prevention is necessary. Australia has the experience of sustainable agricultural development, often because you did the unsustainable things first and learnt through research, to change. You have a rural population with much knowledge and regional centres with scientific clout in tropical and subtropical agricultural research. Why don't you use it? Why do you not seek to form a new Australian alliance between agricultural development, environmental sustainability, and the military peacekeepers? May I personally add that it is my belief that Australia could probably get much more value from its—at least seen with Scandinavian eyes—very modest investment in development assistance, by such innovative methods.

Why do you not seek to form a new Australian alliance between agricultural development, environmental sustainability, and the military peacekeepers?

We have also heard about the fish wars, and we will hear more about them this afternoon. It may be more appropriate to comment on this later. But we see some of the same pattern developing. In addition to the state-organised fishing, or normally overfishing, in territorially-disputed waters, there is an armada of rogue shipowners equipping themselves with heavy machineguns and grenade launchers alongside their fishing nets in order to intrude into undisputed waters of others. The solution is arguably not to be found in attempts at mass sinking of these modern loot-seeking pirates but a review of the whole fisheries sector. I come from one of the biggest fishing nations in the world, yet our fish farming now has a greater value than the wild catch, and, as a bonus, it has probably saved the Atlantic salmon from the fate of the Tasmanian tiger. Research properly applied does not only create food, it creates livelihoods, prosperity and protects the environment—the salmon story has many of these ingredients. Again Australia has a big role to play, for in the archipelago of the Arc of Instability, these fisheries battles are now being fought, and the spillovers lead to reckless hunting on the high seas.

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We are also going to hear a lot more this afternoon on freshwater quantity and quality. Decreasing quantities of high quality water in a period of declining competitiveness of agriculture, compared to non-food users, for that water, gives rise to concern. Australia is well placed internationally for the development of conflict-resolution methods for water issues. You have these issues at home.

Ladies and gentlemen, as an agricultural scientist it has been a fascinating morning. I was trained as a scientist to help to increase productivity, and I wrote my doctoral thesis partly on material on soil surveys of the soldier settlements along the Murray and the Murrumbidgee, and in the Goulbourn valley. Part of my thesis was compiled on the hill next door, in the early compound of CSIRO on Black Mountain. I have followed the Australian success stories in agricultural research. I have seen the increasing awareness of the environment and concerns about biodiversity. I have seen Australia discuss land and water development as a Northern Myth 33 years ago, and I have seen Australia taking responsibility for regional security north of Darwin. The combination of these capabilities seems to me to give Australia a unique chance to stabilise the unstable through careful use of both ploughshares and swords. Ultimately the integrity of Australia depends on its ability to protect its own vital interests through ensuring development among its neighbours, to help them to build futures linked to their own lands, and become more valuable political and trading partners. This, ladies and gentlemen, is my reflection on four excellent and unusually innovative presentations this morning.