

Reflections on trends and issues: in international development – food supply, affluence and trade – and on challenges and issues for Catholic social services

Remarks from Anne Astin to a planning day for Catholic Social Services Victoria on 9 December 2016

The world is changing rapidly and these changes will impact the work of CSSV and how it can realise its future vision, mission, values, strategy and priorities.

We can examine some of the impacts through 3 lenses:

1. Services to the community and our participants (demand driven);
2. Future needs of those (including CSSV members) who provide services to the isolated and marginalised in our world (supply driven); and,
3. CSSV's future needs its sustainability, reputation and credibility (organisational sustainability).

In looking at the changing global environment, some of the key issues for reflection include:

(a) The need for a secure and reliable food supply.

There's a powerful narrative being told about the world's food system. The world's population will grow to 9 billion by mid 21st century, putting substantial demands on the planet's food supply. To meet these growing demands, we will need to grow almost twice as much food by 2050 as we do today. And that means we'll need to use advanced technologies to produce this additional food. It's a race to feed the world, and we had better get started.

We face tremendous challenges to feeding a growing, richer world population—especially to doing so sustainably, without degrading our planet's resources and the environment. To address these challenges, we will need to deliver more food to the world through a balanced mix of growing more food (while reducing the environmental impact of agricultural practices) and using the food we already have more effectively. Key strategies include reducing food waste, rethinking our diets and biofuel choices, curbing population growth, and growing more food at the base of the agricultural pyramid with low-tech agronomic innovations. Only through a balanced approach of supply-side and demand-side solutions can we address this difficult challenge.

Tomorrow's consumers will either be well - educated and technologically enabled or from a developing country and living in the depths of poverty, whether overseas or locally. Whichever he or she is, tonight there will be nearly 250,000 more for dinner than there were last night!

This will place tremendous pressure on our social services.

(b) Increasing Affluence of the global middle classes

While population is projected to grow by 2 billion between now and 2050, there are about 3 to 4 billion people on earth already who are becoming more affluent. The emerging new "wealthy" are living mainly in China and India, but not exclusively — and, if recent history is a guide, these richer people are investing in land, property and businesses overseas, including Australia.

Foreign ownership of Australian agricultural land, property and business is increasing creating greater competition for local residents as well as impacting on the demand for local and community based services

(c) International trade

Australia has always been a net exporter of raw and manufactured goods, It has established a reputation as a supplier of high quality and reliable products.

In future, demand for our products may increase to the point where the drive and profit from the export market means we can no longer supply our domestic consumers. It is highly likely that the costs of goods and services will increase placing more pressure on those people who are not able to afford them.

It will also add to the costs for Government and increase the impost on philanthropic organisations who are the greatest investors in social service provision.

If we now look at some of the future issues with potential to impact in our local environment, again these include but are not mutually exclusive, to:

(a) Future sustainability of a plethora of "small" organisations, many of whom are CSSV members, with different and valuable skills in an increasingly competitive market where the quantum of finances available remain the same and with no prospect of increasing.

(b) Continued reliance on volunteers - the future role and status of volunteering, its recognition and support in an increasingly regulated environment may not be sustainable. We also rely heavily on senior and retired individuals for volunteering. There is a conscious need for succession planning for ensure the sustainability of our future volunteers. Alternatively, services may need to discontinue

(c) Succession Planning for future sustainability – Increased demand for services requires increased resources. This is true for current services, but as population increases and new locations and suburbs are created being able to meet growing demands will need to be addressed.

(d) Access to services, education and pathways to employment critical to community development and capacity building. Building resilience and achieving self sustainability for both individuals and communities remains a key objective. Influencing government policy should remain a priority for CSSV.

In examining CSSV's future role, some of the priority issues to be considered are:

(a) Organisational sustainability for CSSV

Increasingly, this is a key strategic issue. We have trusted, committed and professional CSSV staff who dedicate themselves totally to the organisation and its raison d'être. The team is a small one and in the absence of funding for growth, we need to make sure the reputation and recognition that our current team has established is not lost. With increased demands in future, maintaining a sustainable and satisfied workforce is important.

(b) Maintaining and leveraging our Relationships.

Maintaining and continuing to enhance our position with our key stakeholders is critical to our sustainability, particularly the Archdiocese, State Government, Catholic Social Services Australia and our members.

Further, how we leverage our relationships with similar organisations to create greater value and improved services will be needed as we continue the mission of Jesus in the metropolitan and rural Victoria.

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