

Graham F. Donaldson, farm economist and development practitioner, 1937-2023

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Graham passed peacefully at Annapolis March 16, 2023. His life, spanning upbringing in rural New South Wales (NSW), Australia, to retirement in rural Eastern Shore, Maryland, USA, is well told by his children Fergus and Peta in <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/annapolis-md/graham-donaldson-11208089>. Our intention in this note is to elaborate some of his valuable work based in England in the 60s and in Washington, D.C. in the 70s, 80s and into the early 90s.

Graham had his formal training in agricultural science and economics and became an influential agricultural development economist. His professional development in Australia benefited greatly from his mentor Keith O. Campbell at the University of Sydney, and colleagues such as John L. Dillon, Ronald C. Duncan, Fred H. Gruen, Alan A. Powell, Ross M. Parish and David Throsby who had creatively staffed the active knowledge hub of the Division of Marketing and Agricultural Economics of the NSW State Department of Agriculture (leading to such pieces as Donaldson 1964).

Graham subsequently moved to Wye College (University of London) where he undertook research on the relationship between harvest-time weather uncertainty and investment in combine capacity (for his PhD thesis), a focus on farm mechanization and technology that continued over much of his early career. This was further emphasized when Graham took a year's sabbatical leave in Ottawa working for the Canadian Royal Commission on Farm Machinery. Graham also lectured in the economics department at Wye and interacted with other insightful economists such as Gerald Wibberley, Ian Carruthers, Paul Webster, and John McInerney (e.g., Donaldson and McInerney, 1967; Donaldson and Webster ²1968). In a prescient act during his Wye College days, Graham encouraged then MSc student (and later World Bank colleague) Roger Slade to help develop a research proposal on the secondary economic impacts of agricultural projects, which led the UK aid agency (then ODA) to fund the Muda River study in Malaysia through the FAO/World Bank Cooperative Program. Roger was subsequently hired to undertake the field surveys in Malaysia, and at a seminar presentation at the Bank in 1974 was introduced by Graham (then at the Bank) to the Bank's Development Research Center (DRC) colleagues Peter Hazell and Clive Bell, leading to a collaborative research study that provided the first empirical estimates of the income multipliers generated by a project in its surrounding region (Bell, Hazell and Slade 1982).

Graham joined the Bank's Central Agriculture Division (under the direction of South African Monty Yudelman) in September 1970 where he first undertook (with consultant John McInerney) an assessment in Pakistan of the outcomes of the Bank's lending program on tractor

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² Later Anderson (1975) complemented this work by introducing stochastic-efficiency sorting of Monte Carlo-generated farm plans, to complement the pragmatic procedures for accounting for risk in farm planning led by Hazell with his MOTAD approach (Hazell 1971).

mechanization (Donaldson and McInerney 1973). The findings were controversial and demonstrated that, counter to project expectations, double cropping and agricultural output did not increase on the mechanized farms nor did the project significantly reduce poverty; instead, the major outcome was simply that large farmers acquired the tractors, dispossessed their tenants and single-cropped their larger farm areas. Based on this work, Graham helped change the Bank's approach to farm mechanization in rural development projects. His work soon expanded to include irrigation, roads, health, education, as well agricultural credit, marketing, trade, extension and research, not to mention also food security (e.g., Donaldson 1984).

Graham was rapidly promoted to Chief of the Agricultural Economics and Policy Division (AGREP) that provided the conceptual and practical guidance for the Bank's rapidly expanding portfolio in rural development. He was the primary developer of the Sector Policy Paper on Rural Development (World Bank 1975), which was the important effort to articulate needed Bank-supported rural poverty alleviation efforts, energized greatly by Robert McNamara's Nairobi speech (McNamara 1973) that surely reflected "Donaldson thinking", as conveyed by Yudelman (e.g., elaborated in Monty's 1977 conference presentation and entertainingly fleshed out in his Bank oral history notes). We see Graham Donaldson as a regrettably unsung hero for early World Bank endeavor to reduce global rural poverty. This is not the place to take issue with our other recently passed Australian friend Martin Ravallion but, were Martin able to make a second edition of his signal tome on *The Economics of Poverty* (Ravallion 2016), we would be humbly suggesting that he might adjust his discussion of Rebalancing Development Thinking (page 117) to reflect better the efforts of the Bank, and Graham Donaldson in particular, in the 1970s rural development program. [The earliest World Bank reference per se that Martin cites in that great book is 1980!]

As Graham's former (Australian) colleague Jack van Holst Pellekaan fondly recalled to us: "Graham was an excellent manager and leader. He gave his team regular guidance but never micromanaged a project or activity. He usually focused on the big strategic picture and encouraged his staff to do the same. If things went wrong, he provided support and the one thing about Graham I recall vividly was his advice at a difficult time that 'this too will pass'. His approach to learn from mistakes and move on was a lesson Graham gave me that I have never forgotten."

When Graham moved on from the Central Agriculture Department to work in the Operations Evaluation Department (now the Independent Evaluation Group) he, amongst many other things, wrote the first evaluation of the Bank's performance in implementing the rural development program. The hurdles and stumbles rural development had faced were many and he detailed these instructively in a well balanced and nuanced way (as nicely recorded for posterity also in Donaldson 1993) that helped the Bank and others chart future interventions that were more effective in reducing rural poverty, such as in the later *Vision to Action* and *Reaching the Rural Poor* World Bank rural development strategies.³

³ For instance, Donaldson (1991) is one of the key references cited in the review of Anderson and Thompson (2001).

We count ourselves fortunate to have interacted with Graham in our own professional (and personal) lives and hope we can speak for his many such admirers, particularly those who have now also passed, that we really miss him and honor his contribution.

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