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The Human Dimensions of Climate Change:
THE POLITICS OF FOOD AND WATER SECURITY IN AFRICA

Reflections on an international conference held at Aberystwyth University, 18-20 September 2013

Comments and responses are welcomed by the DDMI and conference organisers in contributing to ongoing research in this area. Please contact Dr Carl Death (carl.death@manchester.ac.uk) or Dr Grant Dawson (gsd@aber.ac.uk). Copyright remains with the authors, and any errors are the author's own. Please cite as DDMI, 'Conference reflections: The Politics of Food and Water Security in Africa', *The Davies Papers: Africa Series #4*, April 2014.

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Introduction: a landmark event

Dr Carl Death
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The David Davies Memorial Institute of International Studies (DDMI) held a major international conference on the critical topic of 'The Human Dimensions of Climate Change: The Politics of Food and Water Security in Africa' on 18-20 September 2013, at the Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University, UK. The conference was organised by Sir Emyr Jones Parry, Professor Ken Booth, and Dr Carl Death, and supported by the Climate Change Consortium of Wales (C3W), Aberystwyth University's Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS), the Welsh Centre for International Affairs (WCIA), the Department of International Politics, and the DDMI.

The conference was a landmark event. It included internationally renowned experts from the worlds of public policy, international organisations, and academia, as well as politicians, diplomats, civil society activists and members of the media. Participants came from a wide variety of fields, including international relations, food and water research, law, the natural sciences, geography, development studies, and diplomacy. Approximately 60 people were present over the three days of the event. The plenary address was delivered by Jean Ping, former Chairperson of the African Union, President of the UN General Assembly, and Foreign Minister of Gabon, who confirmed that 'climate change is a major challenge for Africa', and highlighted progress on initiatives such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), the trans-boundary reforesting programme across the Sahel region known as the 'Great Green Wall of Africa', and attempts to protect the trees of the Congo Basin through REDD+ funding (the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries).

The conference addressed the multiple levels of food and water insecurity in Africa – global, international, national, and local – in relation to the uncertainties created by climate change and the demands of political negotiations and power struggles. The programme comprised four academic panels and five addresses, and all were followed by keen discussions involving the audience. They covered conceptual definitions, political priorities, theoretical frameworks, and policy interventions. Issues discussed included climate change, crop science, natural resource management, water infrastructure, the African state, food production and distribution, land grabs, livelihoods, and many others. The full list of presenters and papers is below.

In the first panel of the conference, organiser Professor Ken Booth wondered whether as an international community we have a 'responsibility to feed': an 'R2F' in the same style as the much-vaunted 'responsibility to protect' or 'R2P' agreed at the 2005 UN World Summit. This set the tone for one cross-cutting theme of the conference which explored the degree of responsibility – both as in 'blame' and as in 'duty' – of the international community in general, and western politicians and publics in particular, for food and water insecurity in Africa. Professor Booth's reflections on the contributions of the conference to these and other discussions are below.

One of the purposes of the conference was to bring together out-going and in-coming postgraduate students on Aberystwyth University's interdisciplinary postgraduate programme in Food and Water Security.

This was a great success, with existing and new students having an opportunity to meet, debate issues covered in the course, and engage with some of the key figures in the field. Reflections on the conference discussions by some of the out-going students – Gediminas Lesutis and Peter Hughes – are contained below. For more details of the Masters programme see http://courses.aber.ac.uk/postgraduate/food-and-water-security-masters/

Another strength of the conference was the opportunity to engage with audiences outside academia, and not only in the policy and diplomatic worlds, but also with local civil society activists and community groups. Reflections by two community activists – Märit Olsson and Julie Green – follow below.

The conference was made possible through the tireless assistance of student helpers and volunteers. Justa Hopma, Desiree Poets and Florian Mikal were invaluable aids to the conference organisers. Justa is also working on a PhD in Aberystwyth on the politics of food security, and her reflections on the interdisciplinary challenges and potential of the topic and the conference are included in the papers below.

Finally, the conference was live video streamed and broadcast over the 'Food and Water Security – On-line Research Resource' website. The video is accessible via the DDMI homepage (www.aber.ac.uk/ddmi) and the 'Storify' web story can be accessed here too. For more details of the online elements of the conference, see the paper below by Grant Dawson.

Africa: emancipation and the responsibility to feed

Professor Ken Booth
DDMI

The reflections that follow are a synthesis of my opening and closing comments at the conference. I want to thank all those who supported the conference – mentioned by Carl Death above – and the participants who helped make the event itself not only intellectually stimulating but also a very enjoyable occasion indeed.

REFLECTIONS ON STUDYING INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

I do not think that my involvement in the study of International Politics has been primarily driven by the disinterested pursuit of knowledge, though the subject has always been fascinating in itself. Even if the thought has sometimes only been vaguely in the background, the most powerful driver has been the idea of trying to contribute to thinking about a better world. For much of my career the focus was explicitly on war and the prevention of war. When I first came as a student to Aberystwyth – the University College of Wales as it then was – I was expecting to study Geomorphology. I dipped my toe into International Politics because it intrigued me, and I had enjoyed History at school, and here I am still doing it, 52 years later, and cursing that I will never be old enough to read all the books I want to read.

I was not only fascinated by the subject-matter of International Politics, but I came also to be very taken by the story of how the Department of International Politics had been established. In 1919, as some of you will know, David Davies endowed the world's first chair in the subject in Aberystwyth, in memory of the students of the College who had been killed in the war. His vision was that of a liberal internationalist. His liberalism expressed itself in his belief in peace through education, and his internationalism in his hopes for peace through international organisations, law, and justice rather than the balance of power. From the beginning of International Politics as an academic discipline, therefore, there was always a relationship between the classroom study of the subject and the reality of world affairs outside. The approach Davies advocated to the former, incidentally, was explicitly multi-disciplinary – the study of economics, law, and civilisations as well as politics.

REFLECTIONS ON AFRICA

My interest in Africa stretches even further back than the start of my student days. This is a long personal story going back to when I was about six years old: I thought I would become an African.

An opportunity arose for my father to join a long-standing workmate to go to work in South Africa – in the coal and gold mines of Springs, east of Johannesburg. For months if not a couple of years I thought it would happen and was excited when I looked at books with colourful pictures of jungles and big animals – a child's picture of Africa, not the reality of Springs I later learned. A bookish child, I came to be able to draw the map of Africa, and was of course proud to colour in red the parts that belonged to the British Empire. The British victory in the World War that had finished only a few years earlier, and the reality of a world-wide Empire, were very much in the air we young boys breathed at that time.

Life was a truly hard struggle in mining villages in the north of England in the late 1940s/early 1950s, and the opportunity to emigrate to sunny colonies with the prospects of better living standards – and not being in the frontline of major wars – appealed to lots of families. Many moved to Australia and South Africa. In the event, we did not move to South Africa, and I did not know why for many years later.

What happened was that when my father's former workmate came back from Springs on a visit, to try and persuade my dad to join him, the outcome was just the opposite. His friend painted pictures of a life-style unthinkable for working-class people in austerity Yorkshire of the time – not least of his photographs of his flashy car – but this was not what mattered. The material opportunities were one thing, but what I learned later proved to be the decisive matter for my father, and why he rejected the opportunity to go and work with his old friend, was what a few years of living in a land of white supremacy had done to his friend's personality and politics. The ideology of apartheid had entered his being. When I learned of this, many years later, I was proud of my dad's difficult choice.

I retained a simple boyish interest and image of Africa. I particularly recall being taken to a Test Match at Headingly before I was 10 – I was a Yorkshire boy from a cricketing as well a socialist family after all – when the South African cricket team came to the UK in 1951. I remember being impressed by sun-tanned players, who seemed taller, fitter, and more athletic than their sun-deprived opponents. For many years I could recite the names of the whole South African team. It did not cross my mind until long after that they were all white.

Fast-forward sixty years – through the apartheid years in South Africa, the British retreat from Empire, the apparently endless wars across Africa, the poverty and famines that regularly figured on the news, the Mandela miracle – and all the rest. In 2012, our younger son got married, and his wife is from Kenya. So, I did not become an African all those years ago, but fate has brought me an African family, and it makes me very happy.

Academically, I am not a specialist on Africa, but I have had this long-standing concern with the continent and the people. For the past twenty years the fascination has been given something of an academic dimension with the great help of one of the contributors to this conference, Peter Vale. He invited me to a historic workshop in Namibia in 1993, and persuaded me to write a theoretical paper on security in the context of Africa.[1] Subsequently, he and I wrote a couple of pieces,[2] and in my attempts to write about security-as-emancipation and 'real people in real places', an African illustration is rarely absent. I have tried to encourage students to develop any interests they might have in the study of Africa, and in particular have gained a great deal from PhDs on African topics, such as ECOWAS, the genocide in Rwanda, the workings of SADC, and the democratic transition in South Africa.

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1   Ken Booth, *A Security Regime in Southern Africa: Theoretical Considerations* (University of the Western Cape: Centre for Southern African Studies, Working Paper No. 30, 1994), 30pp.

2   Ken Booth and Peter Vale, 'Security in southern Africa: after apartheid, beyond realism', *International Affairs*, Vol. 71(2), April 1995, pp. 285-304; and 'Critical Security Studies and Regional Security: The Case of Southern Africa', pp. 329-58, in Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams, editors, *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

REFLECTIONS ON SECURITY

Security in some way has figured in all these PhD theses, and for me since the late 1980s emancipation has been explicitly at the heart of theorising security. Emancipation, of course, is a controversial term in this field. When faced by the blunt question – What is emancipation? – for a long time I could only give an extended semantic and theoretical explanation. Then I came upon the work of an English radical – a Chartist – William Lovett, who in 1876 published a book with the title *Life and struggles of William Lovett, in his pursuit of bread, knowledge & freedom with some short account of the different associations he belonged to & of the opinion he entertained.*

Out of this impossibly long-winded title jumped the three keywords for answering the what-is-emancipation? question from thereon: the pursuit of *Bread* symbolises the primary significance of the material bases of life – and especially food (which implies water); the pursuit of *Knowledge* concerns the desire to escape ignorance, superstition, and the lies and manipulation of the powerful; and the pursuit of *Freedom* embraces the struggle to get out from under forms of political and economic tyranny. In other words, 'emancipation=bread, freedom, and knowledge'.

In relation to this conference, the key point regarding emancipation is that we cannot invent the humanity we aspire to – a humanity in a condition of justice and equality – without food and water. Food and water are foundational to emancipation. In this sense, Responsibility to Feed (R2F) is the precursor of all other state and societal responsibilities to protect.

'Security' itself is a contested term of course, and this should not be a cause for surprise, for it is a powerful word, a powerful idea, and a powerful dimension of policy. Security is powerful in these different ways, first, because it is a need of human existence, and second, because it makes things happen.

Security is a need of human existence in that its absence to any significant degree means that humans cannot sustain social life. Without a degree of security, we (whoever we are) cannot attend to babies and their growth, teach children, develop communities, or build sustainable and humane states.

As a need of social existence, it is helpful to begin thinking about security in relation to the condition of insecurity. Being insecure means living a determined life. When the daily life of people is entirely dominated by the search for the basic means to survive, they are deprived of the opportunity to develop more fully as human beings. Politically, those in such a position are largely powerless; they are silenced. A Bengali villager put it like this: 'It is not very hard to silence us, but that is not because we cannot speak'. People need political institutions to have a voice, but also the physical and mental resources to act in relation to those institutions. Providing those is political too. This is one of the major themes of the 'Human Capabilities' approach advanced by Martha Nussbaum and her associates.

To be insecure at the individual level is to be trapped in one's own life, whether through violence or poverty, or other structural or contingent conditions. At the level of states one can draw attention to the fact that those that are chronically insecure do not excel in economic development, cultural richness, or human satisfaction. Chronic insecurity for states can come from many things, and most obviously the threat of war. And one of the things countries have fought about in the past, and might in the future, is food and water. These bare necessities of life have geopolitical as well as family histories.

Security, I mentioned, is a powerful word. When politicians use it, they expect to make things happen; they expect resources to be mobilised. Traditionally, the label 'security' loosens the purse strings for military purposes. One of the impacts of the broadening of the concept of security in recent decades has been to show that while military matters are still important, there is more to security in the round than the provision of military hardware. Security, for sure, is about 'big and important things' (to borrow a phrase from Kenneth Waltz) such as war and the distribution of power, but it is also about little and important things, such as the fate of individual people.

One of the key aspects of thinking about security is choosing the 'referent' to prioritise. That is, who or what do we want to privilege – individuals, communities, a particular class, nations, states, religions, civilisations, the international level of politics or the global. Different political assumptions deliver different referent objects to prioritise.

As the referents for security extend outwards beyond individuals and families, the more explicitly does the business of security become imbued with 'politics' in the sense of governments and political parties. My preference is for a broad conception of politics, namely Harold Lasswell's classic 'Who gets what, when, how?' (I like to add 'where', and also give it a world-wide dimension by adding 'globally'). With this broad conception, we can conceive politics all the way down. This broad definition introduces politics (via gender relations for example) into the family as well as all other levels of social interaction.

Security is therefore deeply political, and deeply politicised. The key security choices consequently derived from our fundamental political theories and assumptions:

First, as just mentioned, there are choices about the referent. The arrival of the idea of 'human security' and 'Responsibility to Protect' onto the international stage marked a shift – at least declaratory – towards giving more attention to individuals and citizens as opposed to the state – the Westphalian norm of the previous 350 years.

Second, politics shape decisions about threats and risks (which danger is most pressing?). How should a government balance food security for example as against military security, or welfare spending against spending on foreign aid?

And after trying to balance threats and risks, there are political choices about how much should be spent – how much is enough? – and how it should be spent – which strategy offers the best hope of success?

Uncertainty obviously runs through all these issues. Security policy operates in the domain of uncertainty. The shadow of the future is invariably seen as a threatening one. Traditionally, security policy's uncertainty was focused on military threats to the state. Here, the idea of the 'security dilemma' was central – the unresolvable uncertainty one government has about the intentions of others. In other words, is a neighbour's military power for defence only, or possible aggression? In the past 25 years, a much broader conception of security has developed. And we find here different sorts of uncertainty. Instead of psychology doing a lot of work (the challenge of getting into the minds of others to resolve security dilemmas) now we have science doing a lot of work, when we contemplate the uncertainty induced by 'climate chaos' (this was originally the World Wildlife Fund's term, and one I prefer to the almost benign-sounding phrase 'climate

change'). Another difference between traditional and some contemporary threats is that the former came from identifiable 'enemies', but the threat in the case of climate chaos is people and societies who are for the most part far away and are not acting as wilful enemies. How do we change the minds of a huge chunk of humanity when it comes to the ways of life they have either become used to, or to which they aspire? This is yet another challenge – and one of global significance – to the primordial difficulty in international relations of collective action. Collective action is difficult, to say the least, given that states are committed to pursuing their own national interests – that is, striving to maximise their security, maximise their economic potential, and protect their way of life – and all in a context where the default position is not to trust outsiders.

The broader security agenda (including food and water challenges) is new but not new. Some security specialists – bizarrely in my view – talk about these things as 'non-traditional' or 'new' security challenges. But of course they are not new: they are both old and traditional, for they have always been security problems for somebody on earth. It is just that security specialists in the Global North have generally not recognised them as security challenges. This underlines the significance of 'referents' and the way they are shaped by underlying political theories and attitudes. Often, these matters are unthought, taken as natural and normal (this is the point I was making in describing my boyish images of the British Empire).

One response to some of the challenges I have mentioned is that of 'Food Sovereignty'. While few of us – I imagine – would have any problems with stressing the importance of local production, lower food miles and so on, it strikes me as a rather inchoate idea, and the not terribly useful importation of a juridical term ('sovereignty') into the issue of delivering food security. Sometimes the idea seems to imply that sovereignty and food autarky are synonymous, which is not helpful. Sovereignty and interdependence politically are quite compatible. In its juridical sense sovereignty has always been thought to be a barrier to intervention (the idea is enshrined in the UN Charter) so what are the implications of so-called food sovereignty in this regard? Is it an argument not to intervene if there are defaulters – if governments in a food sovereignty world deprive one ethnic group or another of food? Does R2F then fly in the face of R2P? Thinking about sovereignty these days in general is contested and confused, so it is not obviously a good idea to put the term 'sovereignty' at the centre of the food and water security debate.

As the argument above makes evident, security policy is deeply politicised, and also deeply implicated in economics. In the past century or so politics and economics became separated (with economics becoming a specialised technical activity) but the old phrase 'political economy' reminds us of their essential unity. You don't need to be a Marxist to recognise that economics is more than a technical discipline in the social sciences. In 1981, the very un-Marxist Margaret Thatcher said: 'Economics is the method. The object is to change the soul.'

Let me illustrate the interconnection between economics, politics, and security with a very simple illustration. None of us are surprised, unfortunately, when the TV News shows pictures of starving children. We would be absolutely surprised if the starving children were surrounded by grieving *rich* parents. People and countries with money don't suffer hunger and thirst. (One slight exception, but one that proves the rule, is the elective and temporary hunger in the rich world on the part of those dieting because of systematic over-eating).

Food and water are limited, and their exploitation and delivery involve cash: on both sets of grounds they therefore raise political issues. Money does a lot of work. As ever in such cases, redistribution is a brilliantly neat solution to scarcity. But it is so neat that is it is an explosive political issue, for power is always reluctant to let go.

Power operates at different levels in Africa and beyond – grassroots, state, international and global – and each of these different but interrelated levels must be given their due. We need for example to think how power works in research and public policy involved in the inputs in supplying food and water, and how it works in the outputs in the ways it affects individuals, communities, and states. These issues, the agenda of this conference, are overflowing with complexities, interrelationships, dilemmas, and challenges.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CONFERENCE

The conference had four main aims: networking, raising the profile of the issues, developing policy implications, and promoting interest in multi-disciplinary approaches to the topic. It would be presumptuous to claim immediate success on these essentially long-term goals. What can be said is that contacts were made and contact details exchanged, there were conversations among people about working together, much discussion took place of practical matters in a political context and policy matters in a scientific context, and the interplay of politics with all aspects of the topics under consideration was examined.

In these senses, the conference was a short-term success. It dropped a collective pebble in the pond on each of these issues. It is for all of us, individually and collectively, to see how big we can make the ripples in the months and years ahead.

Is there enough political will to feed the world?

Gediminas Lesutis
MSc Food and Water Security, Aberystwyth University

The conference was opened by Sir Emyr Jones Parry who briefly discussed the work of Amartya Sen, notably that, contrary to conventional belief, most famines are not created by food shortages. Harvest failures, reductions in food imports, droughts and so on are often contributing factors – but far more important are the economic systems that determine how a society's food is distributed. On the other hand, the very last conference talk, entitled 'Can we feed the world?', was given by Sir Gordon Conway, who discussed how sustainable intensification of food production is central in order to effectively address the problem of global food insecurity. After having juxtaposed the beginning and the end of the conference, I could not help but ponder whether the question 'can we feed the world?' is the one worth asking.

During the last decade or so, the scholarship on famine and hunger has demonstrated that the problem of hunger is not only economic but also inherently political. Whilst Sen's ground-breaking work on famines conceptualized them as economic phenomenon, scholars like Stephen Devereux, Alex de Waal and Jenny Edkins have shed a different light on the problem of hunger by focusing on its socio-political determinants – political violence and unequal and exploitative socio-political power relations. To some extent, a few of these ideas coming from this rich and provocative body of literature have been echoed in such food sovereignty and/or agrarian justice grassroots movements as *La Via Campesina* that fundamentally challenge the traditional conceptualization of food security. This includes elements of Sen's work on famine, e.g. seeing hunger as an economic problem that can be addressed by the neo-liberalization of the national agricultural systems and food markets. From the point of view of those movements, the problem of hunger is the direct by-product of the world system as we have come to know it; namely, the global corporate agricultural system that it is characterized by the unprecedented market power, the monopoly of agri-food corporations, increasingly concentrated land ownership, growing links between food and fuel economies and a shrinking natural resource base.

Therefore, for me, one essential question was missing throughout the conference. That is, is there enough political will? Or rather, do we *want* to feed the world? Some aspects of this formulation of the question were raised by the conference audience. However, the fundamental reason why this question was not extensively discussed was the missing voices of those actually affected by the problem of hunger – food security practitioners, agrarian justice and/or food sovereignty movements. The coming-together of mainstream academia and diplomacy such as this conference is interesting. However, the discussion of the problem of hunger by those least affected by it seems somehow incomplete. At best, it provides an incomplete picture of the problem of hunger. At worst, by excluding counter-current voices of food sovereignty and/or agrarian justice movements, it contributes to the further marginalization of those most food insecure.

The 'bio-economic' framing of food and water security

Peter Hughes
MSc Food and Water Security, Aberystwyth University

The conference discussions did not tackle head-on, but rather skirted around the edges of a fundamental controversy around 'food and water security'. This undeveloped yet critical debate merits direct and in-depth attention in future discussions on the subject. I draw attention to an embedded 'bio-economic' framing, based on problematic assumptions around biotechnological solutions to hunger. Sir Emyr Jones Parry's opening comments provide an interesting example of this. Citing policy regimes in Burkina Faso and South Africa which encouraged food production increases stemming from genetic modification (GM) technology, Sir Emyr clearly defined a wider role for biotechnology in food and water security in Africa: "... the need to do that on a wider basis across the continent, drawing perhaps, on what has been achieved in those two countries, [is] paramount".

This pivotal assumption highlights the contestation between what theorists have termed the bio-economic and the eco-economic paradigms. Both paradigms make substantive sustainability claims via different pathways. The former asserts the role of innovation, biotechnology and sustainable intensification; the latter places emphasis on recalibrating economic behaviour and practices to realign production-consumption chains and capture local and regional value.[3]

Two points are crucial here. Assertions regarding GM – such as those by Sir Emyr – are always inherently political. Secondly, they also tend to reinforce and institutionalise this dominant framing food and water security as a bio-economic paradigm, through embedded discourses of power and politics.

However, the way that food and water security is framed and subsequently institutionalised, merits a deeper, critical discussion. For example, the motivations of corporate industries as well as social and economic concerns of farmers and consumers lie at the heart of the debate over whether GM really should be seen as *paramount* within an institutionalised vision of food security. Indeed, such framings prioritise the role of global biotech corporations as 'providers' of food security, while paying less attention to promoting local and regional food security at the grassroots level. Behind the discourse, there exists a global seed and agri-chemicals market worth billions of dollars per year. Indeed, assertions made by non-Africans over what is good for Africa arguably renews old issues of corporate colonialism on the African content.

It is time for a re-evaluation of the language around 'food and water security'. Future debates must now include discussion of alternative social, economic and cultural dimensions, while critically examining the assumptions of the bio-economic paradigm.

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3   Lawrence Kitchen and Terry Marsden, 'Constructing sustainable communities: a theoretical exploration of the bio-economy and eco-economy paradigms', *Local Environment*, 16(8), 2011, pp. 753-69.

Continuing the debate on climate change in Africa

Märit Olsson and Julie Green
Affrica – Mid Wales Africa Network

The "Affrica – Mid Wales Africa Network" was set up by small local groups with links in different African countries such as Dolan Llanbrynmair (Uganda), Volunteer to Change (Ghana), Hazina (Tanzania), and Supocho (Malawi).[4] Each group has different areas they concentrate on but climate change is something we can all see the effects of in the different African communities. 'The Human Dimensions of Climate Change: The Politics of Food and Water Security in Africa' conference seemed in its name to encompass the problems that we face. The task ahead can often seem very daunting and therefore it is important to arm ourselves with the relevant knowledge required to progress in our work in some of the worst-affected countries.

Listening to speakers who have worked at the very forefront of the battle against food and water insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa was both encouraging and inspiring. The conference not only focused upon the situation as it stands now in Africa, but looked closely at what can be done about it and the effect that research is having. We were shown throughout the conference how important and effective research can be and the visit to IBERS (the Institute of Biological, Environmental, and Rural Sciences, Aberystwyth University) was therefore of great interest. It was fantastic to see the research being carried out to develop crops resistant to disease; that are drought tolerant and generally more tolerant of the changes in climate. It showed in a clear way how plant breeding programmes can have a huge impact on tackling the effects of climate change – how we can adapt and help others to adapt. We do this through knowledge and through working together with a common goal.

The conference reinforced the need for dialogue between countries. Jean Ping, the keynote speaker, in particular displayed how diplomats, charities and NGOs all have a place in the discussion of how to feed the ever-increasing population in the world.

Leaving a deep impression on us was Professor Sir Gordon Conway who managed in a clear and concise way to show the effects of climate change in Africa. He talked about the severe effects on the world and showed how they threaten a "perfect storm". However, he was not all doom and gloom. His matter-of-fact way of showing how small innovations on the ground in local communities could make a huge difference to communities and also reduce the carbon emissions made a huge and lasting impression. His talk planted the seed for the Mid Wales Africa Network's new initiative: a conference in Machynlleth on 4 April 2014 entitled 'Africa-Wales: Climate Change'**.** For more information see https://www.facebook.com/1racc

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4   **Volunteer to Change**: P.O Box 247, Llanon, SY23 9FF, volunteer@volunteer-to-change.com. **Hazina**: 2 Tan y Bryn, Corris Uchaf, Machynlleth, SY20 9BX, Tel: 01654 761582. **Dolan Llanbrynmair**: tel 01650 521816, **Supocho**: supocho@yahoo.co.uk

The politics of 'interdisciplinary' research

Justa Hopma
PhD researcher, Aberystwyth University

The recently held conference on food and water security at Aberystwyth University provides a good opportunity to reflect upon the merits of interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary research. Even though the conference programme did not use either of these terms to locate itself on the 'map of knowledge production' so to say, the conference content drew on a variety of perspectives, 'including international relations, food and water research, law, the natural sciences, geography, development studies, and diplomacy', as noted in the introduction to this set of reflections. It is important, however, to be explicit about the kind of knowledge production or exchange that is sought after. In this regard, the following brief definitions of 'multi'- and 'inter'-disciplinarity highlight an important distinction: multi-disciplinarity involves the 'contribution from two or more fields to a research problem', whereas inter-disciplinarity actively seeks the 'integration of knowledge originating in two or more fields'.[5] The difference is significant and impacts how academic practice is conducted. Prior to delving into why this matters, I would like to illustrate the difference between these definitions with reference to two conference presentations.

In *Panel I: Questions of Security* Dr. Engobo Emeseh told us, based upon her experiences with the Africa Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), that capacity-building methods often assume the crucial importance of the role of individuals. In practice, however, the enabling environment – comprising domestic institutions and organisations – is often more consequential in terms of building long-term capacity. This particular point was very interesting in relation to Professor Wayne Powell's presentation the following day. Powell spoke about crop research and mentioned possible future cooperation between an IBERS (Institute of Biological, Environmental, and Rural Sciences, Aberystwyth University) 'Africa Unit' and universities from African countries. The 'Africa Unit' could train the next generation of crop scientists and contribute to food security challenges in Africa in this manner. Taking Emeseh's experience and Powell's initiative, it would have been interesting to have assessed and debated both within the broader context of food security research. How do ideas stemming from different disciplines about the common theme of 'capacity building' relate to each other? Why did Emeseh warn against the individualist approach? Why does Powell see its merits? What common ground could possibly have been found in this specific instance? I would have loved to see them engage in a discussion about the process of capacity building.

This brings me back to the question of what our goals are when we bring together various perspectives in discussions of climate change and food or water security. Is the objective merely to *recognise* a plurality of viewpoints and as a result enrich one's own perspective, or, is the point rather to attempt at least some degree of integration or synthesis? If the latter case, what format – at conferences, in teaching and other academic exchanges – could best support such complex interactions? In this respect the reflections and feedback on this conference presented in this set of papers are valuable material for thinking about how to strengthen and refine such processes.

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5   Jerry A. Jacobs and Scott Frickel, 'Interdisciplinarity: a critical assessment,' *Annual Review of Sociology* 35, 2009, p. 45.

What have we learned? Has our awareness of the complexity of the topics we study solely become sharper or have we also been able to identify potential avenues for future research in which contributors from different disciplinary orientations could work together more closely? Are we actually convinced that we can indeed learn from wholly different perspectives, or, have we become more entrenched in our own views and are we glad to return to our own respective 'disciplines'? I think these are important questions to ask.

Such questions are particularly pertinent in a research environment where universities as well as funding structures reward "interdisciplinary" work. What assumptions lie beneath such drives for "interdisciplinarity"? Does the evidence on its merits hold up? It is crucial to examine these assumptions and scrutinise the institutional processes that claim to enable "inter-disciplinary" research outcomes. This conference has made clear that inter- or multi-disciplinary approaches provide a unique opportunity to gain access to specialist knowledge and ideas in a variety of fields. Knowledge of this kind is a *sine qua non* for understanding and acting upon complex problems that have effects in different locations in the world. However, without critical reflection upon the processes through which such ambitious research outcomes are sought, initiatives may leave themselves open to the criticism of jumping on the "interdisciplinary" bandwagon without fully accepting the meaning of the term.

DDMI and social media at 'The Politics of Food and Water Security in Africa' conference

Grant Dawson
DDMI

The DDMI made great strides into the social media domain at 'The Politics of Food and Water Security in Africa' (FWS) conference. The reason for this is two-fold. On the one hand, the DDMI was looking for new ways to disseminate information to reach out beyond its core audience in the Department of International Politics. On the other, the officers of the DDMI realized that it is important to stay up-to-date and engaged with emerging technologies that have the potential to further its mandate of promoting peace and cooperation through research and discussion on international politics, and keeping the legacy of Lord Davies alive.

The FWS conference was the DDMI's most ambitious foray yet into social media. On the suggestion and initiative of the Aberystwyth University Communications Department, a 'Storify' web story was created of the conference that included tweets, videos, photographs, and text on a single page. Tweets from participants and conference assistants can be read in order on the web story, and one can view photos of conference VIPs, such as Sir Gordon Conway (former President of the Royal Geographical Society), Jean Ping (former President of the United Nations General Assembly), and Ken Booth (former DDMI Director). A special highlight is the video of 'Welsh singers' – actually veterans of a decades-old rugby squad having a reunion – who entered the hall where the conference dinner was taking place and treated us to several rousing songs.

Conference assistants and Aberystwyth University Communications Department staff were constantly on Twitter. Three assistants live-tweeted the conference, in no less than seven languages (Dutch, English, French, German, Greek, Portuguese, and Welsh)! An example is the following tweet from a conference assistant in Greek: 'Μιλώντας για την καινοτομία στη γεωργική πρακτική στην εποχή οικονομιών κλίμακας και τις προσπάθειες της ηθικής αγοράς' ('Talking about innovation in agricultural practice in the era of economies of scale and the efforts of ethical markets'). Daniel Yeo of the Global Green Growth Institute actively tweeted the conference. Welsh Government official Francis Dixon was among the attendee tweeters. Her after-action tweet is included in the web story: 'One of the best conferences on the topic I have attended so far.'

The FWS conference also used Skype and video streaming. At one stage during the conference, a recorded speech by Lord Malloch-Brown was played. This was followed by a live Skype video Q&A with Malloch-Brown, who was in New York. The entire conference was live video streamed and broadcast over the 'Food and Water Security – On-line Research Resource' website, which the DDMI helped establish. The video is accessible via the DDMI homepage (www.aber.ac.uk/ddmi) – click the link on the right of the page. The 'Storify' web story can be accessed here too.

The DDMI plans to continue its social media engagement to connect with its audience scattered across the world. A DDMI Twitter account (@DDMIAber) has been set up. As new social media technologies emerge which can be of use in furthering the DDMI's activities, its officers will take them up while not distracting from the core intellectual aspects of a conference or event.

APPENDIX: Conference programme

Wednesday 18 September

4.30-4.40pm: **Welcome**
April McMahon, Vice-Chancellor of Aberystwyth University

4.40-5.35pm: **Introduction**
Sir Emyr Jones Parry, President of Aberystwyth University: 'The politics of food and water security in Africa'

5.40-7.00pm: **Panel I: Questions of security**
Chair: *Ken Booth*, DDMI and Aberystwyth University

Ken Booth, DDMI and Aberystwyth University: 'What's it all about?'

Engobo Emeseh, Aberystwyth University: 'Climate change, natural resources management and food security in Africa: Issues and trends'

Peter Vale, University of Johannesburg: '"Die blount en die blou": State-building, security and food in Southern Africa'

8.30-10.00pm: **Plenary address**
Jean Ping, Former Chairperson of the African Union, President of the UN General Assembly, and Foreign Minister of Gabon: 'The Human Dimension of Climate Change'

Thursday 19 September

9.00-10.30am: **Panel II: water security**
Chair: *Carl Death*, University of Manchester

Inga Jacobs, Water Research Commission: 'The Water-Energy-Food Security Nexus: Challenges and Opportunities for Food Security in South Africa'

Muna Mirghani, WATER Transboundary Resource & Advisory Center: 'Water and food security in Africa amid climate change and national political drivers' [unable to attend]

Daniel Yeo, 'Red Herring or Black Swan? Climate, water (and energy) in Ethiopia'

Larry Swatuk, University of Waterloo: 'Green Water Productivity: A new approach to "water for food security"'

11.00-11.30am: **Food production and distribution**
Chair: *Sir Emyr Jones Parry*

Alun Davies AM, Minister for Natural Resources and Food, Welsh Assembly Government

11.35-12.35pm: **Africa, the UN, and the world**
Chair: *Sir Emyr Jones Parry*

Lord Mark Malloch Brown [Recording, and skype QandA]

12.45- 3.45pm: **Crop science**
Wayne Powell, Aberystwyth University*: presentation and tour of AU's Institute of Biological, Environmental, and Rural Sciences

4.15-6.00pm: **Panel III: Agriculture and rural development**
Chair: *Médi Moungui*, FAO

Fantu Cheru, American University: 'Beyond "land grab" – Peasants, the State and Foreign Direct Investment in African Agriculture: assessing the technology, finance and knowledge platforms'

Boaz Blackie Keizire, African Union: 'The Politics of Agricultural Development in Africa and within the CAADP Framework' [Unable to attend]

Joseph Yaro, University of Ghana: 'Climate change and adaptive capacity: the case of sustainable rural livelihoods in northern Ghana'

Friday 20 September

9.00-10.30am: **Panel IV: Research agendas in food and water security**
Chair*: Kamila Stullerova*, Aberystwyth University

Eric Danquah, University of Ghana: 'Training plant breeders at WACCI for the future of food security in West and Central Africa'

Carl Death, University of Manchester: 'Critical research agendas in food and water security'

Paul Johnston, Greenpeace International Science Unit, Exeter University: 'The Weather Gods: Insights into African Climate Change'

11.00-12.00: **The future of food and water security**
Chair: *Sir Emyr Jones Parry*

Sir Gordon Conway, Imperial College London: 'The Sustainable Intensification of Land and Water'

12.05-12.30pm: Concluding discussion