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**MAKE FOOD NOT WAR: PRO-SECURITY OPTIONS FOR THE ASIA  
PACIFIC REGION**

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# Make Food Not War

## Pro-Security Options for the Asia Pacific Region

BERIS GWYNNE

Notwithstanding the diverse backgrounds and interests of speakers and participants, there is clearly a significant measure of agreement on the fundamental importance of secure access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality food and water to sustain life and to support economic growth and sustainable development. There is also broad agreement that, with population growth and increasing usage rates, competition between urban and rural consumers and between industry, agriculture and the environment for available and, in some respects, diminishing resources is likely to contribute to tensions within and between nation states in the 21st century.

The consensus is less clear with regard to the likelihood of wars being fought over food and water, with recognition readily given to the importance of other factors, the impact of globalisation, unequal distribution of wealth, population growth rates, the arms race (in particular the proliferation of small arms) and the ravages of HIV-AIDS. But there is little doubt that food and water insecurity is an important element in creating the conditions in which conflict is an acceptable option, increasing the intensity of the engagement, and resulting in high 'real' costs in fragile environments and opportunity costs in resource transfers. The vicious circle of poverty, violence and environmental degradation is maintained.

On this basis, the discussion about whether wars will be fought over food or water is somewhat academic as food and water security or its absence will impact on all other areas of human endeavour, making strange bedfellows of humanitarian and environmental activists, advocates for social and economic justice, proponents of sustainable development, investors, scientists and researchers, and military men.

There are also divergences in opinion with regard to the degree of urgency which should be attached to the search for solutions, reflecting in the main, the experience of the individuals concerned. The relative abundance of resources (including food and water) in developed economies like Australia creates the impression that our problems are relatively minor compared to those elsewhere which are someone else's responsibility. Further more, our confidence regarding the inevitability of science and technology delivering the required miracles leads us to assume that solutions will be found—the 'blue' revolution is just around the corner—and doomsday scenarios will be averted. For those whose recent experiences include chronic shortages of resources and a succession of natural and man-made disasters, the vulnerability of our planet is all too apparent and the distribution of the benefits of recent progress gives little cause for comfort.

Against this background, while previous presenters argued the case for a fully integrated, holistic approach, the contributions of Professor El-Beltagy, Dr Williams and Mr Blackmore provide substantial and in some ways, surprising, consistency in their identification of common themes and priorities for action.

## Knowledge

If improved food and water security would significantly reduce the incidence and intensity of conflict on an already damaged planet and accelerate sustainable development for the billions still living in poverty, heightened awareness and greater understanding of the issues will be required to translate concern into action. Awareness raising and advocacy has to be informed by research to ensure that the information on food and water security situations is current, accurate, and reliable, particularly if there is room for debate among the different stakeholders with regard to availability, quality, usage, cost structures and the distribution of benefits. Analysis is required to transform information into knowledge, and communication systems need to be in place to ensure that all stakeholders have access to the knowledge available.

Research, analysis and communication are critically important in the development of policy and regulatory frameworks appropriate to each situation, and to support and promote innovation. In the latter regard, Professor El-Beltagy and Dr Williams emphasised the need for further work to improve usage of current water and food (including fisheries) resources, to increase the supply of water available from non-conventional sources, and to reverse or repair previous environmental damage. In all of these respects, there is room for more determined pursuit of the transfer of new technologies to bridge the technology and digital divides, to

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gather, analyse, manage and disseminate information and knowledge as the precursors for action.

## **Engagement**

Despite the variation in subject matter, the presentations of Professor El-Beltagy, Dr Williams and Mr Blackmore attached priority to the same issues in regards to engagement.

Each called for improvement in relation to the overarching policy and regulatory frameworks, pointing to the need for more and perhaps better targeted research and analysis to assist policy formulation and decision making. The importance of institutional strengthening and capacity building activities to support stable, effective and efficient governance and management systems was stressed, as was the need for better coordination between the various international, national and community organisations to improve capacity to ensure compliance.

In line with earlier presentations, Professor El-Beltagy, Dr Williams and Mr Blackmore emphasised the importance of a fully integrated, holistic approach, given high levels of inter-connect- edness in ‘living’ systems and the high probability that adjust- ments in one area can have significant impact in other, sometimes less obvious ways. Food and water security issues defy simplistic definitions and demand multi-sector, multi-disciplinary, and multi-dimensional solutions:

- multi-sector in terms of the necessary involvement of government (politicians, civil servants and the military), business and the private sector, the academic and scientific communities, and civil society, including non-government and grassroots or community-based organisations;
- multi-disciplinary in terms of the connections with economics and employment, health and education, agriculture, political and environmental sciences, management, international devel- opment cooperation and community development;
- multi-dimensional in terms of the intersection of global, inter- national, regional, national and intra-national discussions relating to the oceans and seas and river basins and catchment areas.

In this context, all three presenters underlined the importance of wide consultation among stakeholders and high levels of partic- ipation on the part of landowners, farm-workers and fishermen and community and women’s groups. The brokering of meaningful conversations between stakeholders representing vastly different interests and with very different backgrounds in what are frequently highly conflictive situations—what Dr

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Williams described as 'consensual management'—is clearly a challenge in itself. Open communication is difficult to achieve in the absence of common understandings of issues and shared objectives, but, in addition to the achievement of food and water security objectives, the 'process' provides exposure to negotiation and conflict-resolution techniques among stakeholders and promotes networking and alliance-making to achieve a common goal.

In this sense, conflict resolution is not just a by-product. Building local capacities can and should be an objective of scientific and technological interventions in support of food and water security, to assist conflict prevention and peace building and to strengthen the communities' ability to deal with other issues.

## **The Challenges**

Professor El-Beltagy, Dr Williams and Mr Blackmore cited case studies to support their conclusions with regard to the need for improved governance and management systems, and an integrated, holistic, and participatory approach. At the same time, however, they flagged significant challenges facing the international community which will undermine our efforts if not quickly and comprehensively addressed.

Firstly, to transform concern into commitment and commitment into action, the information, knowledge and communications elements referred to previously are not sufficient if there is no shared world view—the 'enlightened self-interest' referred to by Mr Blackmore—or some other clarification of the 'values framework' or 'social contract' which shapes our own stewardship of the planet's resources and our responses to the needs of others. At what point is there need for more scientific examination of the economics of food and water security, the principles of interdependency, and inter-generational equity issues?

If we are to assume that globalisation is here to stay, at what point is it in our interests to ensure that there is an equitable sharing of benefits, perhaps even some constraints on the 'lifestyle' consumption levels of the minority, in favour of a reasonable livelihood for the majority?

As mentioned previously, the occupants of the 'lucky country' in their island fortress have special barriers to overcome if we are to play our part in global efforts in support of food and water security and influence those who may be in a position to have even greater influence on 'global futures'.

Secondly, the international relations framework established during the first half of the 20th century is seriously frayed as a result of the enormous and very rapid changes which have

occurred, particularly under the 'globalisation' banner. The primacy of the nation state is no longer secure, with significant political and economic activity now occurring in non-state (including a range of illegal) contexts. Smaller government is 'in'—with the prevailing market forces, privatisation and de-regulation impacting on a range of services previously deemed to be the responsibility of governments, in what Dr Williams referred to as 'sometimes misplaced assistance'.

The democratisation of 'multilateralism' through the United Nations and its specialised agencies is being challenged as developed countries withhold contributions and pursue their own and their corporations' interests through 'economic' organisations which they are more readily able to control. Developing countries see their unequal participation in the old economy replaced by even less equitable access to the much faster-moving 'new' economy.

In this context, it is reasonable to ask who decides what constitutes the 'common good' for the planet and its people when the interests of 'the people' and 'people' in different parts of the world are not necessarily the same as the interests of the state or a global investor? How is it possible to legislate among non-state actors? And who will hold whom accountable to ensure that an international sustainable development code of ethics or 'triple bottom line' approach is maintained?

Thirdly, with increased emphasis on processes of integration, consultation and negotiation, new skills are needed for the range of participants, from scientists to community development workers, political leaders, civil servants and businessmen. Integration cannot be at the expense of action, where attempts to cover every sector, discipline or dimension paralyses effort, or where in the absence of good governance and contemporary management systems, no work proceeds. Multi-skilling should not be pursued if better outcomes can be secured by appropriate alliances with expertise in relevant areas. And the higher costs of integrated, participatory approaches to development and conflict prevention—when there are no 'templates' or 'blue-prints' to suit every occasion—cannot be absorbed within existing budgetary arrangements.

Finally, the call for the creation of a learning environment in which critical success factors such as sustainable outcomes, an equitable distribution of benefits, the longevity of solutions, the reversal of earlier environmental degradation, and prevention of further damage are identified, criteria for objective evaluation are established and 'learned lessons' are acknowledged and applied.

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## Conclusion

Relatively speaking, Australia is blessed with an abundance of food and water, and, as was demonstrated by Mr Blackmore's video illustration, the freedom to engage in vociferous debate on river system management. It may be that we can afford to take the long view. Global economic interdependency and the complex relationships between poverty and conflict, industrial development and the environment, and the speed of change would urge against complacency.

Either way, we are uniquely placed to understand and identify with the extraordinary challenges facing developing countries—many of them in the Asia Pacific region—and to galvanise increased effort and additional resources in support of scientific and technological research to promote global food and water security. There is mounting evidence that defensive positions are not sufficient, and there is ample opportunity in preparation for the re-convening of the Earth Summit (Rio + 10) for us to start to put our house in order. Future generations will not regard us well if we fail to pick up the baton as the millennium commences.