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Food fights for life: Food diplomacy for food security

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Abstract

Stored food production is critical to food security. Food security refers to the physical availability of, the economic and physical access to, and the ability to utilize food (FAO, 2008, available at; http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/al936e/al936e00.pdf). Stored food production is a vital link in that chain: enabling the protection of (surplus) harvest to be made available when needed. Indeed, the means of stored food production constitutes an incentive for (surplus) harvest itself. However, food, food security, and alongside both, food *diplomacy* are not only practical concerns and challenges but also political. Furthermore, the politics of food are intrinsically related to health security, water security, and climate security, issues with increasing effects across the globe if at different orders of magnitude. Food insecurity may be measured higher in arid regions without adequate water and harvests and storage, but it also exists in 'urban deserts' without affordable access to (fresh) produce. In this presentation, I outline a cartography to depict the interconnections between local and global food securities using the characterization of diplomacy *of* food and *for* food, and food science *for* diplomacy. The aim is to enhance exchange of ideas and experiences to benefit food security – and reduced waste – in both food secure and food insecure settings.

Introduction

Food security is one of a litany of global challenges. Food security refers especially to the security *from* threats to food insecurity – including health threats, threats posed by climate change, and additional shocks such as economic upheavals (see Venezuela) and armed conflict. States alone, even if and when they want to act, can only do so much. That states themselves can constitute a threat to food security underscores a limit to this arrangement. "*The policy authority for tackling global problems still belongs to the states, while the sources of the problems and potential solutions are situated at transnational, regional or global level. "*However, food (science) for diplomacy, by contrast, can promote health for security in both developing and developed states, especially when it emerges from developing country contexts and is communicated with developed states.

The politics of food go far beyond states though states arguably remain control of the in- and outflows of food. These include direct actions such as state-based agricultural subsidies; (in)direct mechanisms of state and private sectors, that influence the export of lifestyle, including food, paradigms; and also more diffuse influences such as preferential trade agreements and humanitarian aid programs which exert economic as well as social pressures at all levels of the food chain – from planting decisions to food choice. Food politics is also subject to external shocks, including health crises, such as the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa which led to decreased sowing as well as harvesting and subsequently to increased food insecurity in the region. Thus while any viable and sustainable response to food insecurity in view of such challenges requires state action, it also depends upon inter-national, as well as global and local action.

It is at the formal and informal diplomatic levels that knowledge exchange to recognize; design; maintain, cope; and adapt models and modes to rising threats to food insecurity, including innovative insight into improved stored food protection takes place. Indeed, continuously improved stored food production technology integrated with political decision-making can actively support food security. The alternative to continued knowledge exchange and innovation, especially as set against the continuing and intensifying challenges that increasingly impact food security worldwide, though in some instances appearing as inevitable, is resistance and withdrawal (Gaire, K.R., 2015). Yet 'doing nothing' is also a political and policy choice. It does not imply stagnation, however. It can lead to significant upleaval: for instance to population displacement, further contributing to instabilities and insecurities. In order to avoid uncharted change, planned – if not predictable – responses are necessary.

Three ways to chart possible diplomacies to interconnect local and global food securities are summed up as 'diplomacy of food, diplomacy for food, and food science for diplomacy'. First, diplomacy *of* food includes the elevation of food to an issue of international, notably security, concern. Second, diplomacy *for* food is broader, and includes diplomatic efforts on the parts of states to increase awareness not only of food crises but of solutions. These include diplomatic efforts by state and non-state actors to facilitate access to food according to the criterion of availability, access, and utilization. Third, food (science) for diplomacy in turn includes research and innovation enabling the development and production of, food – and food storage – interventions.

Food Rights and Responsibilities

The balance of food rights and responsibility is underscored by the discourse of human security, introduced in the 1994 Human Development Report, (UNDP, 1994), which emphasizes state and non-state responsibility to promote and protect the rights of its human beings, including to food. It proceeds on the assumption that the achievement of health, while vital, is but one of a litany of local / global challenges facing policy makers. Other prominent competitors for attention include state security writ large, as well as additional aspects of human security – economic, environmental, and food, to name a few.

This has led to the notion on the one hand that food rights are tied to state responsibility and to state security. Yet in practice, food security at the global level has mostly been left to World Food

Program and FAO, both dependent upon Member State financial contributions and votes to authorize distribution and support. On the other hand, the global human security narrative has advanced the claim that health rights are universal, their implementation the responsibility of the international and global communities. As globalization – in communication technology, travel, and climate change –accelerates, so too does the urgency of identifying and addressing rights, including those to food, and responsibilities globally and locally. This is especially critical as policy issues compete for priority: the crises of climate change, energy security, food production and the financial system "represent serious potential threats…in international politics, the prospects for global" "diplomacy, and the effectiveness of global health governance mechanisms."(Lee, et al, 2011, Filder, 2007).

Diplomacy of food

This section analyses the elevation of food to an issue of international, notably security, concern. It focuses on the role of diplomacy and diplomatic efforts to put food security on the international agenda.

Diplomacy for food

This second applies an analysis that is broader that that introduced above. It extends to diplomatic efforts on the parts of states to increase awareness not only of food crises but of solutions. These include efforts by state and non-state actors (NSAs) to facilitate access to food according to the criterion of availability, access, and utilization. As such, it represents a move from advocacy to action, notably on the part of states and NSAs. It traces the shift from food delivery to food production and trade (for example through the implementation of debit cards to enable local purchase and to spur local production).

Food (science) for diplomacy

This section looks briefly at tried and tested examples as well as new research and innovation enabling the development and production of, food – and food storage – interventions.

Discussion

These insights need to be shared: food security requires food diplomacy at all three levels, local, national and global, to recognize and respond to food insecurities across the board; and to critically exchange knowledge based on empirical evidence and (political and social) experience to surmount threats to such insecurities even at different orders of magnitude. This discussion also includes the anticipated impacts of climate change and migration on changing food needs and patterns.

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