

UNAPMCDRR talk by Robyn Alders – 20220921

Building resilience through food security panel

My topic: How food security activities fit within an all hazards/One Health approach and opportunities to pursue intersectoral resource usage efficiency to deliver a range of benefits

Talk begins here:

Thank you.

In addition to the excellent points made by my fellow panelists, there are three key messages that I hope you'll take away from my short talk:

Firstly, food security and food systems are complex and can both exacerbate and mitigate existential risks;

Secondly, secure access to safe and nutritious food underpins human civilisation as we know it; and

Thirdly, achieving food and nutrition security requires effective and efficient intersectoral collaboration.

OK, so now I'd like to unpack each of these points.

The first point is that food security and food systems are complex and can both exacerbate and mitigate the existential risks we are facing.

This complexity is reflected in the range of food systems that underpin food security.

It is really important that our discussions and policies recognize that some food systems are more ecologically sustainable, more equitable and more likely to contribute to healthy diets than others.

We need to focus on the promotion of food systems that are, at least, carbon neutral and, preferably, contributing to both carbon sequestration and the production and distribution of safe food that efficiently meets the nutritional requirements of people of all genders and ages.

My second point is that secure access to safe and nutritious food underpins human civilisation as we know it.

In many countries we tend to overlook the fact that farmers and fishers are key contributors to human health and society.

Without them, the broad range of human endeavours beyond the farm and the fishing boat would not be possible. Clearly, none of us could sit here today unless farmers and fishers had produced food surplus to their needs and value chain workers had delivered it to us here in South Brisbane.

And beyond meeting our own nutritional needs, history has repeatedly taught us that a secure food supply is the most potent 'weapon of peace' available to humanity.

The equitable provision of food security could more than halve human conflicts.

And yes, you heard correctly, achieving food security for all could more than halve the number of human conflicts.

And now to my third and final point.

Achieving food and nutrition security requires effective and efficient intersectoral collaboration.

Last year, the UNDRR International Science Council published the Hazard Information Profiles as a supplement to their technical report on Hazard Definition and Classification.

The food related hazards highlighted in these Profiles provide a clear indication of the intersectionality of food security.

In a world with multiple threats and limited budgets, to effectively meet these challenges it's vital that we adopt an all hazards approach.

It's interesting to note that the G7 and G20 have recently endorsed the One Health approach which highlights the intersectionality of human, animal and environmental health as a key way to reduce the threat of new pandemics.

This same approach is being used at a global level to bring together the WHO, FAO, UNEP and WOAHA (formerly known as the OIE).

Importantly, this same intersectoral and interdisciplinary approach can strengthen food security and make food systems more resilient.

We need to look at how we grow our food, including where and what we grow.

The good news is that by building resilient, carbon neutral food systems that enhance biodiversity and promote foods with optimal natural nutrient densities, we can reduce the acute impact of disasters on food security while also reducing the more chronic, non communicable disease disasters such as type 2 diabetes.

More efficient use of resources can be achieved if human health, agriculture, environment and trade regulations align to ensure that farmers and fishers are appropriately remunerated for producing ecologically sustainable, healthy food that is accessible to and affordable by those who need it most.

An example of a One Health approach to food security that yields multiple benefits is a nature-based coral restoration project being implemented in Fiji and PNG in collaboration with the Kyeema Foundation and Corals for Conservation with funding support from the World Wildlife Fund and the Australian Government.

Benefits from coral restoration include a reduction in the impacts of tsunamis, restoration of marine biodiversity and, once the habitat regenerates, sustainable harvesting of marine food sources.

While waiting for the marine habitat to be restored, local communities are receiving training in indigenous chicken husbandry and households are restocked with indigenous birds using a pass on the gift approach.

This terrestrial component of the project provides direct and indirect support to household food security and helps to conserve indigenous chicken genetic resources. These benefits deliver multiple wins for communities and helps the countries involved to meet 10 of the 17 SDGs.

In addition to the SDGs, the move to sustainable and circular bioeconomies is, in my opinion, essential to achieve the desired transition to resilient food systems.

This new approach to food economies will underpin the successful transition of our food systems.

It helps us to document and reward the indigenous food systems that already meet the criteria of circular food systems.

It will also identify and support the transition of other responsible food systems to become economically, environmentally and socially sustainable.

Without a doubt, these changes are substantial.

But our health economists, our agricultural economists and our environmental economists tell us, that the return on investment in regenerative, equitable food systems will yield huge benefits to individuals, communities and to government bottom lines.

The sooner we adopt strategic whole of national government and whole of global governance approaches to delivering food systems fit for the 21st century, the better for all of us.

Thank you.