

## Global Food Futures Year

The Humanitarian Centre, Cambridge, has taken this title as the theme for their activities and events this year (2013-14) and the outcomes will be published in a special edition of the Cambridge International Development Report later in 2014. In view of our obvious common interests, the Humanitarian Centre has become a Corporate member of TAA and we have become an organisational member of the Humanitarian Centre.

The Global Food Futures was launched at a very well organised seminar at the Sainsbury Laboratory on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2013. Some 150 people attended, representing the diversity of development-orientated organisations based around Cambridge, attendees included several TAA members, with Steve Jones in the chair. Prof Ottoline Leyser, Director, welcomed the participants to the Sainsbury Laboratory. Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, Vice-chancellor of the University of Cambridge assured full support from the University in village-level health, education and agriculture.

There followed a series of six 'quick fire' brief presentations from local organisations:

- Prof Bhaskar Vira, Director of the Conservation Research Institute, explained their interactive work in developing a strategy for food security that combines the resources of the university.
- Dr Aled Jones, Director of the Global Sustainability Institute, described research into sustainability linked to Rio +20, which is embedded into every aspect of the university.
- Adrian Rimmer, CEO of the Gold Standard Foundation, explained their focus on regulatory provisions and capital investment for activities which combat climate change.
- Sean Butler, Head of NIAB International, described the evolution of this new outreach venture that aims to bring the experience of NIAB to resource-poor farmers in Africa.
- Ian Sanderson, Consultant with Afrinspire, outlined the innovative grassroots work of this local NGO towards food security and survival in rural East Africa.

Dr Camilla Toulmin, Director of IIED, then delivered the keynote address on the global issues of future food production and security, and how to ensure food for all. She reviewed the factors affecting food security, such as climate change, increasing energy prices and declining yields. Politics and power were identified as major barriers to meeting future

food needs. Science, she concluded has a major role to play but we also need to overcome food losses (30% lost post-harvest or in the kitchen), poor distribution systems, the spread of obesity, land rights (and sale of such rights to other countries) and competition with biofuels. Funding often is not available because governments do not keep promises. War and unrest further disrupts food production and security. She expected that a major driver over the next decades will be impacts of climate change.

Dr Toulmin acknowledged the probable benefits of new production methods, such as sustainable intensification (eg SRI) and improved seed but warned that nutrient contents need to be given more consideration (such as 'Golden Rice'), effective groundwater policy is needed to counteract the steady decline in water levels and soils - the 'least sexy' of the sciences – need to be better understood (especially in terms of micro-fauna/flora aiding crop yields). Biotech solutions have a role but are fraught, she noted, by lack of public understanding. She envisaged the future roles of science in food security as:

- Soils
- Energy
- Climate
- Disease control

In conclusion, Dr Toulmin stressed that farmers' own innovative practices need to be adapted and applied widely. Indeed, studies of future food security will increasingly include a mix of science and social aspects.

The evening concluded with a networking wine reception.

To learn more of the Humanitarian Centre and to receive updates on future events, please visit [www.humanitariancentre.org](http://www.humanitariancentre.org) and sign up for the mailing list.

KJV. 20.10.13