Introduction to the book: Nexus or Nexuses

- Possibility of re-imagining opened up by failure of the OLD (i.e. 2008)
- Guided by fear of hijack of a good idea, by security and growth industry of the past
- While Nexus much broader than its IWRM predecessor, it still is embedded in Public-Private Partnership, P-P-P instead of P-P-C-P (adding the civic voice)
- New approach has to internalize three politics:
  - Inequality
  - Knowledge
  - Geopolitics
A critique of the global hegemonic nexus narratives

• The emergence of a nexus policy paradigm was fuelled by fears linked to the 2007 and 2008 food and energy price shock

• The World Economic Forum proposed the nexus is 2008
  • Resource access became securitized

• The World Economic Forum’s nexus emphasised demand-led technological and market solutions, and downplayed supply-side limits / the political dimensions shaping control over and access to resources

“A perfect storm”
Beddington, 2009
A critique of the global hegemonic nexus narratives

• The World Economic Forum also draws on the planetary boundaries debate, framed in the age of the Anthropocene
  • Drawing a “safe operating space for humanity” is a highly controversial and political project

• A second approach to the nexus emerged during the Bonn 2011 conference, which was an input to the Rio+20 Earth Summit 2012 Conference
  • Titled: “(The Water, Energy and Food-Security Nexus – Solutions for the Green Economy)

• Received attention for research organizations, governments, UN agencies, the private sector, aid providers, and INGOs, including in Southeast Asia

Planetary boundaries
Rockström et al. 2009
Positioning this book vis a vis f the global hegemonic nexus narratives

- If nexus thinking is to attain poverty reduction goals, it needs to pay more attention to whose food, water, and energy is secured,
  - Clarify by which means the needs of the marginalised will be prioritised

- We also draw on insights from “dynamic sustainability” to show how in nexus approaches often “static” thinking rather than “dynamic” thinking prevails

- Overall, in the book, we follow a pathways approach, seeking to broaden out the inputs to planning processes and appraisal methods, and open up the outputs to decision making and policy to recognise the different pathways to sustainability around the nexus.
The knowledge nexus and transdisciplinarity

Transforming how we come to know

- **Transdisciplinarity**: listening to the concerns of other disciplines and modifying how one’s own discipline defines the problem

- Popperian Approach of Falsification:
  - Egalitarianism – counterbalancing bias of privilege
  - Humility – creating space for contested understandings
  - Pluralism – ethics of tolerance for other values
  - Reflexivity – distancing and interrogating handed-down wisdom
Hybrid governance and grounding the nexus

**Nexus Governance versus Silo Governance**

- Multiple Nexuses – water, energy, food, transportation, storage...
- Multiple Innovations – in technology, behavior and management
Nexus rights and justice

• Issues of rights and justice have been neglected in debates about the water–food–energy nexus

• In this chapter, we relate environmental justice scholarship to the WEF nexus
  • Various claims for justice emerge on individual components of the nexus: food justice, water justice and energy justice

• A human rights-based approach to the water–food–energy nexus could anchor the nexus in a clear normative framework
  • There has been growing momentum around the right to a safe, clean and healthy environment
## Nexus rights and justice

### Arenas of justice around plans for mainstream dams on the Mekong River

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Arena</th>
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| National                                            | National justice system  
National Human Rights Institution                                   |
| Regional inter-governmental                         | ASEAN Intergovernmental Committee on Human Rights (AICHR)  
ASEAN Children and Women Commission                   |
| International inter-governmental                   | UN - Human Rights Council  
UN - Special Rapporteurs  
Universal Periodic Review  
Core treaties (Optional Protocol mechanisms – the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) etc.) |
| International voluntary/non-binding mechanisms      | Corporate policies of project developers / financiers  
Multi-lateral guidelines (e.g. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Standards on Multi-National Corporations)  
Multi-stakeholder voluntary processes (e.g. Hydropower Sustainability Assessment Protocol) |
Ethics and the nexus

• Humans cannot survive without food, water, and energy ...
  • Whilst they may be afforded an economic value, they are also essential to life. Their value transcends economic value alone

• Nexus approaches cannot avoid value judgements, and therefore neither can they avoid engaging in ethics
  • There are, of course, ongoing debates about ethics on energy, water and food... but their interrelationship is less considered
  • Whilst not often framed as such, negotiations around transboundary rivers such as the Mekong are implicitly about trading off values.

• Ethics range from anthropocentric to non-anthropocentric approaches
Ethics and the nexus

• A key challenge is how to shift away from universalistic notions of ethics to render visible the values and ethics of diverse groups of people embedded in particular places, contexts, and histories .... without embracing a stance of cultural relativism.

• One approach that we explore in the book is that of cultural theory, including its relationship with nature and with technology that mediates nature-society relations.
  • Hierarchism
  • Individualism
  • egalitarianism
  • fatalism
Conclusion: ‘Democratising’ the nexus

• The nexus is a contested discourse

• The integrative imaginary of food, water and energy systems into one system is unclear in terms of entry point

• The issue of scale and power and top-down vision may not take into account lived experiences of the nexus from a different perspective

• “Global priorities” need to better connect with local concerns

• Move towards transdisciplinarity
Conclusion: ‘Democratising’ the nexus

• The nexus needs to be reconceptualised away from a technical solution to natural resource scarcity, which is apolitical in origin and intent, and towards a clear and articulated political choice about allocation and trade-offs between resources and the imagining of the future of water–food–energy systems and their interlinkages.

• A clear normative positioning on the nexus around equity, social progress, and environmental justice is needed.
Thank you for listening
Questions and debate?