DEV Research Seminar  
Friday 22 March 2013, 12 noon - Arts 1.83

Feeding Dichotomies: Hunger and Politics in the Middle East and Africa  
Rebecca Farnum (MSc Student, Water Security and International Development)

Abstract
In media, global aid funding, and academia, a false dichotomy is seen around food security and governance: Politics happens in the Middle East; hunger happens in Africa. This false dichotomy was clearly seen during the "Arab Spring" that took place in Spring 2011. When the events began, major news outlets mentioned "unrest in Tunisia over food prices," mentioning one street vendor who had committed self-immolation over economic woes. Within a week, those headlines were gone. And suddenly a "democratic movement" was sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa. When the same political movement entered sub-Saharan Africa, though, and unions went on strike, oppositional presidential candidates were arrested, and people formed their own "Tahrir Protests," headlines read along the lines of "Food riots in Uganda."

This presentation will explore the trends in media, funding, and research on hunger, conflict, environmental resources, and politics in the Middle Eastern and African regions. Attention will be drawn to the disconnect prominent in literature between issues of food security in Africa and political concerns in the Middle East. How this dichotomy plays in to the food security and/or insecurity of individuals in both regions will be explored. The implications for work in international development will be considered and ways of breaking down the dichotomy discussed.

Presenter Biography
Rebecca Farnum is a 2012 Marshall Scholar and 2011 Udall Scholar interested in issues of food justice in the Middle East and North Africa. She is currently pursuing a MSc in Water Security and International Development at the University of East Anglia, where she focuses on the relationship between international law and virtual water. She holds bachelor's degrees in anthropology, international relations, international development, and the humanities from Michigan State University, where her honors thesis investigated "Food and Water as the Middle East and North Africa's 'Coal and Steel': Regional Economic Integration and Peace Prospects."