

Multi-stakeholder initiatives to regulate biofuels: the Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels

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Introduction

- RSB set up in 2007
- criticisms directed to biofuels:
 - environmental:
 - do not mitigate climate change,
 - adversely affect soil quality & fertility, water availability & quality, biodiversity
 - social:
 - huge increase in production of biofuels on land on which food formerly grown → rocketing food prices
 - foreign purchases of land in developing countries ('marginal' land – 'marginal peoples' (McMichael 2010) – insecure land tenure = most vulnerable to alienation/adverse environmental/socio-economic effects)
- technological solutions/CSR standards
 - RSB - potentially far-reaching power & authority
- ***why? how?***

Supporting policies

Why such expansion? Why such policy support for biofuels?

- 4 factors: climate change; rising price of fossil fuels; demand for national energy security; need for rural development
 - adoption of mix of subsidies, tariffs & targets to support domestic industry and increased consumption
 - increasing imports, expansion of production abroad
 - spikes in food prices
 - extensive purchases of land by MNCs
 - growth in plantation agriculture favourable to commercial production
 - poverty in the global South

The outcome: a 'global integrated biofuels network'

- promoted growth of large car, oil and agribusiness MNCs → growth in trade & FDI
 - GIBN: 'less concentration of objects, actors and relations in specific locations/regions, increasing transboundary flows of biofuels, an increasingly globally defined scape, the decreasing dominance of states and governability and a homogenisation and standardisation of products and processes' and increasingly integrated with the global integrated network of fossil fuels (Mol 2007: 303)
- large-scale monocropping biofuel production, increasingly centralised, homogenised production and refining of crops
- proliferation of increasingly complex relationships – partnerships & alliances, investments & trade relationships at different points along the commodity chain – between governments of the North and the South, national and multi-national agribusiness companies (Dauvergne & Neville 2009)

Governing criticism: certifying biofuels

- schemes to regulate production of 'agri-energy' and certify the end product
- contribute to changing the governance landscape & wider GPE within which bioenergy produced, processed & consumed
- 'further harmonisation & uniform standardisation of biofuel products, markets and regulatory regimes' (Mol 2007: 309)
- alliances forged in the process = likely to entrench corporate control (Dauvergne & Neville 2010)

Understanding transformation

- transnational economic processes → agrarian transformation & vice versa (sometimes contested, sometimes supported)
 - **WHY?** and **HOW?** such change unfolding in this way
- ‘Who is driving these new biofuel investments? Where are the centres of power? What are the politics of the underlying policy process?’ (Borras, McMichael & Scoones 2010)
 - specific conditions and relations that enable and constrain the form of transnational economic transformation
- **RSB:** MNCs, national companies, INGOs & NGOS, stakeholder governance structure, process of deliberative decision-making → standards – incorporates particular forms of knowledge:
 - regulates chain of production + contributes to new networks of power, understandings & framings of knowledge, & power relations

Research project: Aims

1. to investigate the formal governance structures put in place to support the process underpinning the formulation of RSB standards and create formal accountability;
2. to identify different actors, groupings and networks contributing to the process and the extent to which their diverse capacities and practices, and expertise and knowledge of the issues, influenced the process;
3. to understand how the diversity of actors shaped both the discursive frames of the debates and the institutional context within which the standards were formulated; and
4. to consider the legitimacy of the knowledge, in terms of framings and discourses, that became embodied in the standards.

Research project (cont.)

1. *What formal governance structures have been put in place to support the process underpinning the formulation of RSB standards and create formal accountability?*
 - **7 chambers:** 1) farmers and growers; 2) industrial producers; 3) retailers/blenders, the transportation industry, banks/investors; 4) rights-based NGOs and trade unions; 5) rural development/food security organisations and smallholder farmer organisations/indigenous peoples' organisations /community-based civil society organisations; 6) environment or conservation NGOs; 7) intergovernmental organisations, governments, standard-setters, specialist advisors, certification agencies, and consultant experts.
 - **deliberation and decision-making by consensus, steering board with members from each chamber, expert groups + outreach**
 - **ie. involving actors involved in, affected by, interested in, have particular expertise in relation to**
- **precise mechanisms through which knowledge constructed?**

Research project (cont.)

2. *Which different actors, groupings and networks have contributed to the process? To what extent have their diverse capacities and practices, expertise and knowledge, influenced the process?*
 - other networks & coalitions may form around e.g. interests, identities, discourses (Hajer 2003)
- ‘the ability to deploy scientific and other forms of expert reasoning has become increasingly essential to effective participation in international governance’ (Miller 2007: 348)
- power = linked to knowledge and practice ie. extent to which knowledge and expertise = influential will depend up on the capacities & practices of those involve, shaped by e.g. cultural capital
- which forms of capital valued by a diversity of global elite actors from different backgrounds?

Research project (cont.)

3. *How did the diversity of actors shape both the discursive frames of the debates and the institutional context within which the standards were formulated?*
- RSB standards embody particular discourses that ‘shape what can and cannot be thought’ (Hajer & Versteed 2005: 175), incorporating a conception of the problems and their solutions
 - political process through which discourses produced & reproduced and others discarded = invisible behind the standards
 - = channelled through formal and informal institutions
 - **How?** → agency in the process through which discursive frames accepted and formal (and informal) institutions constructed ie. ‘cultural politics’ (Fischer 2005: 25)

Research project (cont.)

4. *to consider the legitimacy of the knowledge, in terms of framings and discourses, that became embodied in the standards*
 - ways that legitimacy is *constructed*, and for whom? who is *empowered* to grant legitimacy?
 - illegitimacy, for whom?
 - who and/or what has become invisible through the embodiment of knowledge, why, and how?
 - democratic theory that, in an era of globalisation, must grapple with 'how collective perspectives, valued, and outcomes are negotiated across diverse cultural and institutional settings at an international level' (Scoones 2009: 566)