

Participation in transnational sustainability standard-setting: From discourse to practice The cases of RTRS and RSPO

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Outline

1. Introduction : the emergence of private voluntary standards for soy and palm oil
2. The roundtables, inclusive and participatory multi-stakeholder devices
3. The roundtables in action: do the procedures fulfill their promises?
4. Conclusion

Sustainability standards, third wave of voluntary standards in the global agro-food sector

- ‘Social movement’ oriented standards
 - Organic farming, Fair Trade
 - Niche markets, ‘B to C’, labels



- Retailers’ voluntary standards
 - GlobalGAP, IFS : Food safety as a core objective
 - ‘B to B’, mainstream
 - Non mandatory *de jure* but *de facto* → private ‘public’ policies

- Sustainability standards for agricultural commodities
 - NGO – industry complex (Gereffi et al)
 - Recent, but **more and more commodities concerned**
 - Multistakeholder participatory processes
 - roundtables



- High demand, high prices
- Environmental and social effects: naming and shaming campaigns
- WWF, UNILEVER, Rabobank, IFC
- RSPO : 2004 – PCI defined in 2007 (first certif. in 2008)
- RTRS : 2005 – PCI defined in 2010

About the approach

- Standards as policy instruments / regulation tools, resulting from a series of interactions among actors
 - Policy instruments as institutionalised ideas (visions of the world)
 - Result of a specific process of institutionalization = a process of progressive selection of ideas in a given institutional context
 - → +++ balance of power at stake among actors, on the repartition of discursive resources available,
- From RETHORIC to practice: the MS roundtables in action
 - How do the actors concretely interact in the decision-making process?
 - Influence on the decision process and output, i.e. the content of the standards?
- Methodology
 - Participatory observation in GA (Bali, Buenos Aires, Sao Paolo) and other meetings, Interviews
 - Period under study : 2007-2010

The roundtables, inclusive
and participatory multi-
stakeholder devices

The roundtables: multistakeholder decision-making processes

- **Inclusiveness**
 - Producers, Banks, Traders, Processors, Industries, Retailers, environmental NGOs, social NGOs
 - Open membership (variable fee)
- **Governance structure**
 - General Assembly of members
 - Executive Board (including all categories of members)
 - Executive Secretary
- **Decision-making process**
 - Voting rules (board elections)
 - Seeking for decisions by consensus
 - Betting on social learning and the virtues of deliberation

RSPO

Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil

Seats per category

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oil palm growers
Malaysia (1), Indonesia (1), Rest of the world (1), Smallholders (1) • Palm oil processors and/or traders • Consumer goods manufacturers • Retailers • Banks / investors • Environmental / nature conservation NGOs • Social / development NGOs | <p>4</p> <p>2</p> <p>2</p> <p>2</p> <p>2</p> <p>2</p> <p>2</p> |
|--|--|

RTRS

Roundtable on Responsible Soy

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producers • Industry, Trade, Finance • Civil Society (environmental + social NGOs) | <p>5</p> <p>5</p> <p>5</p> |
|--|----------------------------|

Deliberation as a core feature of the roundtables

- A participative process based on deliberation and social learning
 - Specific technologies (world cafés, role playing games, etc.)
- A variety of inputs to the process
 - Contributions by participants in General Assemblies
 - Consultations on the internet
 - Decentralised participation : on-the-field workshops
- PCI : a process « facilitated » by a consultant
 - Proforest
 - A 'Development Group' for defining the PCIs
 - An iterative process between the DG, Proforest and other inputs

The roundtables in action: do the governance structure and procedures fulfill their promises?

Who represent who and what? (1/3)

- Geographical representation
 - Missing countries, e.g. RTRS : USA, China?
 - Over-represented countries, e.g. The Netherlands
- Inter-category disparities
 - Number of members

Number of members (2009)



• Banks and investors	9	• Producers	8
• Consumer Goods Manufacturers	40	• Industry, trade, finance	42
• Env't /Nature Conservation NGO	11	• Civil society	12
• Oil Palm Growers	70		
• Palm Oil Processors / Traders	100		
• Retailers	24		
• Social / development NGO	9		

TOTAL : 62 members
+ 16 'observing members'

TOTAL : 263 members + 95 affiliated

Who represent who and what? (2/3)

- Geographical representation
 - Missing countries, e.g. RTRS : USA, China?
 - Over-represented countries, e.g. The Netherlands
- Inter-category
 - Number of members
- Intra-category: local/international NGOs
 - A process led by international NGOs
 - Legitimacy conflicts ; E.g. Brazilian NGOs and RTRS
 - Financial dependency (Solidaridad / Fundapaz, Oxfam / Sawit Watch)

RSPO Executive board members

(2009)

civil society



Industry,
trade, finance



IOI GROUP



producers

RTRS Executive board members (2009)



Who represent who and what? (3/3)

- Geographical representation
 - Missing countries, e.g. RTRS : USA, China?
 - Over-represented countries, e.g. The Netherlands
- Inter-category
 - Number of members
- Intra-category: local/international NGOs
 - Legitimacy conflicts ; E.g. Brazilian NGOs and RTRS
 - Financial dependency (Solidaridad / Fundapaz, Oxfam / Sawit Watch)
- Intra-category: smallholders' representation
 - Represented by the FELDA, OXFAM and a human rights NGO in RSPO (no trade unions)
 - Absence in RTRS, then 1, then 0 again.

RSPO Executive board members (2009)

civil society



Industry,
trade, finance



AARHUSUNITED



producers

RTRS Executive board members (2009)

civil society

Solidaridad



Industry,
trade, finance



producers



Explicit and implicit rules for deliberation

- Discursive capacities matter a great deal
 - Budgetary resources (travels, hotels)
 - Human resources
 - Analytical (expertise , internet access)
 - Social
 - Linguistic
 - Cultural
- A central stake : maintaining the compromise
 - Many 'out of the scope' questions
 - Industrial monoculture versus small family agriculture
 - Palm oil: immigrated labor force
 - Soy: GM (a 'technology neutral' standard)
 - A rather partial qualification of sustainability

Forms of protests depending on the social and political context

- RTRS : a highly controversial RT
 - Very active contestation since the beginning
 - Conflicts, esp. among European NGOs (wwf-foe, internal wwf)
 - Pressures by the outside affect insiders NGO first e.g. FUNDAPAZ left RTRS after the entrance of Monsanto
 - Not to be seen
- RSPO: a much more integrated form of contestation
 - Small producers taking the microphone
 - Banderoles inside

Conclusion

- Lessons learned from the analysis of the roundtables 'in action'
 - There is a gap between discourse and practice
 - Deliberative and participative procedures do not automatically achieve deliberation and participation
 - Other visions of the world exist, and foster contestation, which takes different forms depending on the context
 - An informal repartition of tasks among outside/inside NGOs: 'revolutionary' versus 'pragmatic'
- Paths for future research
 - A fascinating actor : the ISEAL Alliance
 - A highly professionalized community with an intense turn-over : Consultants, Certifiers, Brokers, etc
 - Role of governments (national cooperation agencies, international organizations)

- Thank you !