

Sustainable Commodity Governance and the Global South

ISA Catalytic workshop, San Francisco, April 3, 2018
Final report

Coordinators: Hamish van der Ven, Yixian Sun

Description of the workshop

Despite the rise of a burgeoning literature on sustainable commodity governance, the existing research has mainly focused on schemes or initiatives led by stakeholders based in the Global North, and consequently overlooked the agency of Southern actors in responding to Northern-developed rules. As the Global South has become major producers and consumers of many commodities, there is an urgent need to broaden this literature to examine the influence of transnational governance in this part of the world and understudied initiatives led by Southern stakeholders. The main goal of this workshop is to bring together scholars of sustainability governance working on different commodities and regions in order to assess the impacts of transnational governance on the Global South and home-grown governance developed by and for Southern actors. We have tried to engage scholars at different stages of academic career, from different disciplinary backgrounds, and employing different research approaches. Workshop participants have collected rich data through in-depth fieldwork in different parts of the Global South. By convening a diverse group of researchers specializing on different regions and sectors, we aim to draw new trends on sustainable commodity governance to correct North-South imbalances in the existing literature and advance development of theories on global governance.

Summary of the day

The workshop was held on April 3, 2018, in Hilton Union Square, San Francisco. Due to personal reasons, three participants based in North America withdrew before the workshop. Another participant (Tannis Thorlakson) decided to not physically attend the workshop at the last minute due to an unexpected job interview but presented her research via Internet. To supplement these absentees, we invited three relevant scholars who attended the ISA Annual Convention to join as observers and one of them also presented her research. Another scholar who has been willing to participate in the project for the planned special issue also shared her research via Internet. In total, eight participants and two observers physically attended the whole workshop in San Francisco (another observer came just for one session). All in all, we met our plan to convene 10-12 scholars in the workshop for a lively discussion.

The workshop was divided into six sessions: an opening session, four panels for paper presentations, and a concluding session (see the full programme below). It started at 8:30 am by the workshop coordinators. Yixian Sun and Hamish van der Ven first welcomed the participants and explained their motivations to organize this workshop, including examining changing contexts in the Global South for the uptake and implementation of sustainable commodity

governance, recognizing the agency of Southern actors in taking their own actions for sustainable development, and evaluating broader impacts of different governance initiatives in the Global South. Ben Cashore highlighted several limitations of existing studies, especially the lack of considering Southern stakeholders' views and definitions on sustainability, which are often different from norms embedded in global commodity markets or championed in the Global North. After these remarks, each attendee introduced themselves, their research areas, and their understanding on the key questions posed by the workshop. All attendees agreed on the importance of shifting the scholarly focus on the Global South. These roundtable introductions ended around 9:45 am.

The paper presentations started right after the opening session and were divided into four panels lasting one hour for each. For each paper, an author gave a presentation of 12 mins, then an assigned discussant had 3 mins to provide comments, and finally the floor was open for Q & A.

The first panel started at 9:55 am, with two papers using quantitative data at the global level to examine the spread of transnational sustainability standards in the Global South. The paper presented by Philip Schleifer analyzes the diffusion of voluntary agricultural standards in the Global South and compare their institutional designs. The paper presented by Stefen Renckens used original data on Marine Stewardship Council to investigate Southern actors' participation in the relevant regulatory processes such as standard-setting and auditing.

After a coffee break, the workshop reconvened at 11:15 am for the second panel comprising two papers comparing different governance initiatives in the Global South. Kristin Sippl's paper compares two transnational certification programs for artisanal and small-scale gold mining and their impacts on Southern producers. The paper presented by Yixian Sun explores the variation across home-grown governance initiatives in three major aquaculture producing countries – Thailand, Vietnam, and China. During the morning discussions, most participants highlighted the diversity in sustainable commodity governance in the Global South as reflected by various responses of Southern actors to transnational governance schemes.

In the afternoon, the workshop started at 1:30 pm. The first panel focuses on the impacts of private standards in the Global South. Tannis Thorlakson shared her study on sustainability standards of Woolworths – a large South African retailer – on farming practices of fruit and vegetable growers in South Africa. Maja Tampe presented her paper examining perceptions of Brazilian cocoa producers about public and private governance, which affect their compliance with relevant rules. Both papers shed light on the mechanisms through which private governance help Southern producers engage in sustainable production.

The last panel of paper presentation started at 2:40 pm with two papers examining sustainable commodity governance developed by Southern producers. Michael Bloomfield presented his study on Sri Lanka's tea industry, highlighting efforts made by the Southern government and companies to maintain a green and sustainable industry through South-South trade, which has been more equal than North-South trade. Shana Starobin also presented her case study on local initiatives of Nicaraguan producers based on their traditional values and knowledge to serve as

an alternative to transnational certification schemes. Participants have a lively discussion about these cases, especially motivations of the relevant Southern actors to promote sustainability.

The workshop started its final session at 16:00 after a coffee break. The session had two parts. In its first part, three scholars – Peter Dauvergne, Thomas Hale, and Ben Cashore – gave their general remarks on the papers presented and related discussions in the workshop. Each of them highlighted several added values of this new research agenda, while indicating that further work needs to be done for making a generalizable framework.

In the second part, all attendees brainstormed major challenges confronting sustainable commodity governance in the Global South, but also promise for achieving sustainability outcomes in the Global South and potential contributions that our research can make. All participants agreed to participate in a special issue project around this topic and then discussed target journals.

Workshop programme

8:15 – 8:30	Pre-registration (in the workshop room)
8:30 – 9:45	<p><u>Welcome</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housekeeping • Opening remarks by the conveners • Roundtable Introductions • Overview of workshop goals and key questions
9:55-10:55	<p><u>Panel 1: Global perspective</u></p> <p>Philip Schleifer, Matteo Fiorini, and Luc Fransen Governing Tropical Agriculture through Voluntary Standards: A Mapping Analysis</p> <p>Stefan Renkens & Graeme Auld Swimming Upstream: North-South (Im)balances in the Marine Stewardship Council</p> <p>Chair: Benjamin Cashore Discussants: Sippl on Schleifer, van der Ven on Renkens</p>
10:55-11:15	Coffee break, official registration with the ISA Annual Convention
11:15-12:15	<p><u>Panel 2: Comparative perspective</u></p> <p>Kristin Sippl Golden Opportunity? The Fate of Artisanal and Small-scale Gold Mining Certification Programs in the Mercury Regime</p> <p>Yixian Sun & Hamish van der Ven Swimming into their own direction: Explaining Domestic Variation in Sustainability Governance for Aquaculture in Asia</p> <p>Chair: Thomas Hale</p>

	Discussants: Bloomfield on Sippl, Tampe on Sun
12:15-12:30	<u>Morning wrap-up</u>
12:30-13:30	Lunch
13:30-14:30	<p><u>Panel 3: Impacts</u></p> <p>Tannis Thorlakson (via Internet) Improving environmental practices in agricultural supply chains: The role of company-led standards</p> <p>Maja Tampe Governance Interactions in Practice: How Perceptions Create Hyperlocal Compliance from (Trans)National Rules</p> <p>Chair: Yixian Sun Discussants: Renckens on Tampe</p>
14:40-15:40	<p><u>Panel 4: Country perspectives – Asia & Central America</u></p> <p>Michael Bloomfield South-South trade and sustainability: the case of Ceylon tea</p> <p>Shana Starobin (via Internet) Uncertified: Alternative Paths for Smallholder Livelihoods in Nicaragua</p> <p>Chair: Hamish van der Ven Discussants: Sun on Bloomfield, Schleifer on Starobin</p>
15:40-16:00	Coffee break
16:00-16:30	<p><u>Summary remarks</u></p> <p>Benjamin Cashore, Peter Dauvergne, Thomas Hale</p>
16:30-17:30	<p><u>Wrap-up</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World-café • Next steps
18:30-21:30	Workshop dinner @Farmerbrown, 25 Mason St.

Publication plan

The group agreed to produce a special issue of 6-8 papers in a leading academic journal to be co-edited by the workshop coordinators. On the publication outlet, workshop participants have shown a strong willingness to engage a broader audience beyond the field of environmental governance and therefore plan to target an interdisciplinary journal on sustainable development (e.g. *World Development* and *Ecological Economics*). The coordinators agreed to prepare a special issue proposal after the workshop and approach the editors of these journals. The group has also expressed the interest in putting an edited volume in the longer term.

Participants (including observers)

Name	Institution	
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