

Abstracts of Presentations

3. Power Dynamics and Discourses behind Climate Smart Agriculture: Global Context and Contest

Prof. HISANO Shuji (Kyoto University)

The current industrial agrifood and natural resource-use system has been recognised as a key driver of climate change and food insecurity, leading to growing global concerns and the need for international actions to make the system more sustainable. It is within the context of this new era of climate change and food insecurity that the interlinked concepts of “sustainable intensification (SI)” --- an effort to increase crop yields with fewer inputs and without expanding land use [Nature, n.d.] --- and “climate-smart agriculture (CSA)” --- agriculture that sustainably increases productivity, enhances resilience (adaptation), reduces/removes GHGs (mitigation) where possible, and enhances achievement of national food security and development goals [FAO 2013] --- have been mainstreamed in the international community. These concepts have been advocated in particular by global corporations, agricultural exporting states, and the Gates Foundation [Canfield et al. 2021]. Although the underlying idea of CSA has existed since the late 1990s (e.g. the concept of “doubly green revolution” that stresses conservation as well as productivity), this concept is different and more prevailing not only because it is urgently required to tackle both climate change and food insecurity now than ever, but also because (i) it is considered technically feasible due to the development of “digitalization of agriculture” and “genomization of food” while these technologies in turn have become available due to the recent surge in corporate consolidation in the agrifood sector [Clapp and Purugganan 2020], and (ii) it is institutionally promoted through the spread of “multistakeholder” initiatives [Cheyins and Riijsgaard 2014; Hisano 2019], such as the Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture (GACSA), and their mainstreaming as a global governance platform*.

Despite its prevalence, it is not clear, or rather contested, “who will decide what kind of sustainable agriculture will be privileged for what types of agrifood and natural resource use, and who will be the key socio-economic subject of this change” [Alonso-Fradejas et al. 2020, p.5]. There is indeed a growing concern and criticism that “sustainability” and “climate smart” concepts are being appropriated and narrowly defined by those who are responsible for the existing corporate agrifood system. These actors are seeking a benign transition to a somewhat greener system without transforming “the unjust socio-economic, ideological, political, and ecological relations” that characterise

the current system [ibid., p.9]. Uncovering power dynamics behind the mainstreaming and institutionalization of CSA, however, is not straightforward since global corporations and their philanthropic allies can influence policy and governance not only through direct lobbying activities (instrumental power) and their structural influence in the broader economy (structural power), but also through their ability to shape discourse and ideas to legitimise their presence and influence (discursive power) [Fuchs 2007].

In this presentation, I will trace the development of the concept of CSA at international fora and uncover power dynamics behind the mainstreaming and institutionalization of CSA by elucidating the recent corporate consolidation in the agricultural input industry and their market and discursive strategies, and by contextualizing the CSA politics as part of a broader and recent trend of corporate capture of the global food governance.

* The latest and utmost example of “multistakeholder” initiatives and corporate capture of global governance is the UN Food Systems Summit [Canfield et al. 2021].