Hedging our bets: The politics of waste land for biofuels production in India

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- What is promised about biofuel; what happens
- Alternative approach to inclusion of small-scale farmers in BVCs
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Methodology

Data

- Empirical data from Biofuel Park, Hassan District, Karnataka, India
- Secondary data from Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh plus other countries

Analysis

- Uses GPN framework combined with a feminist political ecology framework – allows for the creation of a nexus of power, value, embeddedness, the environment and gender
- Builds on recent paper by Hospes and Clancy on social inclusion in value chains which:
  ◦ contests whether or not social inclusion in GVCs is good for the poor and/or necessarily wanted by them
  ◦ posits that inclusion is multi-dimensional (political/economic/social)
Biofuels in India: mixed discourses

- Energy security: increased domestic production of alternative energy sources
- Food security: Utilisation of waste land – not to compete with food production
- Inclusive development: incorporation of the poor into production chains
Waste land: a contested area

- Approx 55 million ha are classified by the state as ‘waste’ land
- ‘Degraded land that can be brought under vegetative cover with reasonable effort and which is currently underutilised land and land which is deteriorating due to lack of appropriate water and soil management or on account of natural causes’ (GoI 1989)
“Waste land”: different perspectives

- For villagers (particularly landless and women) land not laid down to crops provides ecosystem services such as:
  - Food eg honey
  - Fuel
  - Grazing
  - Medicines
  - Flowers for religious ceremonies

- For nature
  - Ecosystems and biodiversity
  - Part of hydrological systems
The villain of the piece
Jatropha curcas: what farmers are told

- produces oil-rich seeds, is known to thrive on eroded lands, and to require only limited amounts of water, nutrients and capital inputs
- But......................
In practice

- Yields are generally reported as lower for farmers (both under irrigated and rain-fed) than under controlled conditions.
- To be economic requires irrigation.
- Disillusioned small and marginal farmers who opt for exclusion.
What we don’t know

• How Jatropha performs in a wide variety of habitats eg where will it be invasive?
• Not been subject to breeding programmes eg for higher and more consistent yields but reduced gene pool
• What are the optimal levels of inputs
Biofuels in Karnataka: Significance

Political dimension

- State biofuel policy has been influential in design of national policy
- One of most active states promoting biofuel production – worrying recent development: promotion of crop land

Environmental dimension

- Geological feature known as Western Ghats passes through Karnataka - one of three main watersheds for India
- One of world’s 10 “hottest biodiversity hotspots”
Alternative Pro-Poor Approach: Biofuel Park, Hassan District

- Promoted as income supplement not substitution for crops – not ‘get rich quick’ mechanism
- Multiple crop types from indigenous species – fruiting throughout the year (spreads income)
- Uses bunds and hedges; women use their backyards
- Use of “waste” land is community choice but not promoted by HBP
- Each village has development committee 50% women
Gender in Hassan Biofuels Park

- Women tend to be more enthusiastic about inclusion than men
- Women value ease of combination with other household chores
- Not selling to VC but retaining oil for use within community (as allowed under policy) – reluctance linked to terms of inclusion in VC
- Women have concerns about use of waste land (women are responsible for cattle feeding)
Are poor winners or losers in biofuel value chains?

- While ‘rhetoric’ of Indian government Biofuels policy contains pro-poor elements – implementation when left to the market is not
- Promotion of *Jatropha* favours large land-owners who can irrigate
- In terms of the environment it is a ‘leap into the unknown’
- Policy neglects embeddedness – rationalities for inclusion/exclusion
- Values ascribed to non-crop land by rural people are negated
Is it inclusion or exclusion?

- Political, economic and social inclusion can be found
  - **Political** inclusion seems to be confined to local level – no influence on overall policy direction (e.g., use of waste land)
  - **Economic** inclusion is at bottom, low-value, end of chain
  - **Social** inclusion when terms are right – gender difference

- Projects working with rural poor can bring benefits
  - Agricultural extension work to benefit yields
  - Consciously addressing gender differences (e.g., control of access to land) can benefit women
Thank you