

Sustainable Bioenergie

Day One

Interim Summary

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Introduction

Last evening when you were partying, having dinner or having otherwise fun, I went through my notes. After a review with five dedicated “friends of the chair”, I dare to submit some of the key issues around which the presentations and discussions yesterday revolved.

They are a subjective selection and they cover, of course, not all of the important points made, perhaps not even the major ones. But I believe they raise some key questions which merit to be recalled and which might be further pursued.

1. One recurrent issue has been poverty and “access to energy”.

2 billion people lack access to “modern” energy. This is a big socio-political problem which requires – and at the same time transcends – economic and technical solutions. Much rather, it is about human rights and justice.

Quite rightly, it was pointed out, that there will be no sustainable energy future in the world unless the access problematique is addressed and resolved.

2. A related issue has been the relationship between big and small, centralized and decentralized, global and local.

I say “relationship” and not “opposition” although, on first sight, the relationship is freight with conflicts. As we went along, however, we discovered (I believe) that these juxtapositions imply complementarities rather than mutual exclusiveness.

In reality we need both:

- To be sure, domestic markets have first priority, but this does not preclude reaping the benefits from international trade;
- Care must be taken to protect small decentralized producers for local needs and import substitution, but access to global markets and technology transfer might require size and scale.

The underlying questions in need of attention are highly political:

- Who owns and controls what?
- Who benefits where?

Ideally, we are in a win-win situation, but the truth of the matter is: The gains will be unevenly distributed. That needs to be addressed.

3. Food versus fuel was another such intricate issue.

Again, on first sight, the food/fuel trade-off appears deeply conflicting:

- Food production must rise, probably double, to keep with population growth
- Food prices are linked to fuel prices, hitting the poor (particularly the urban poor) hardest.

On closer look, however, it turned out that this need not be so. On the contrary:

- Enough marginal and degraded land is available in most parts of the world, even in the EU;
- Bioenergy production creates rural income and employment.

Bioenergy will transform agriculture, yes. But it cannot, by itself, solve the larger problem of food security. This is first and foremost the task of better management and increasing the efficiency of food production.

4. Trade

Bioenergy trade, both within and among countries, was held to be gravely distorted – through trade barriers (tariffs, quotas) and subsidies. There was a shared understanding that the “playing field” needs to be levelled. Less clear was, how this could be done, especially under WTO rules. More on this today.

However, it appears adamant that trade liberalization, if and when it comes, is accompanied by setting and observing (and possibly mandating) minimum standards.

5. Standards

We have not yet dealt with the tricky issue of the sustainability criteria to be applied. This is the topic of the Roundtables this afternoon.

Yesterday there was a sense that risks (and opportunities) differ from country to country and that, therefore, site-specific criteria are needed. It was said: “There is no global sustainability” – “Not one strategy fits all”.

As this issue is central to the objectives of the conference, let me digress and make an observation from my personal FSC experience.

6. Certification

Agreed, conditions differ greatly from country to country and even within countries. But there are global commons to protect and there are common principles of stewardship

In FSC we have formulated 10 such Principles and worldwide applicable Criteria which are then broken down into indicators to fit regional conditions – some 60 indicators in Germany. No problem.

I am not advocating to duplicate the FSC for bioenergy. All I am suggesting is: Take as a model the globally tested FSC process of deriving national standards from global principles, of assuring compliance and dealing with local grievances. FSC has shown that this process is possible and that it works.

7. Yet, voluntary certification relying on market forces is not enough

We need to talk about:

- which criteria should apply to bioenergy
- whether and how minimum standards and their monitoring is regulated and perhaps even mandated across the board
- and what other complementary policies, fiscal and legal, are needed

Last point: I missed in our discussions yesterday a sense of the urgency of change. So far, we were excellent in analysing the current situation. But less so about what needs to and can be done.

But you still have a full day to go. Let's begin!