

Myths, realities and needs in biofuel development

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Abstract

A few myth exist regarding biofuel development, i.e. that (i) food crop feedstock are always bad / Energy crops and residues are always good, (ii) simple solutions to reconcile food and fuels are available and (iii) indirect land use change (ILUC) risk is new, always very strong concerning biodiesel and, always low or does not exist with second generation biofuels.

The reality is quite different. Sustainable biofuel development is complex, multi-faceted and context-specific. Therefore no sweeping statement is valid, and we should embrace this complexity rather than oversimplify it. The good news is that there is currently enough knowledge and tools to move from (i) food versus fuel towards food and fuel and (ii) model-based ILUC policies and actions towards low-ILUC risk practices and policies.

What is needed is to (i) move away from myths and sweeping statements; (ii) embrace the complexities of sustainable biofuels; and (iii) be constructive and rigorous by using available tools to get things right through an integrated, contextualized and evidence-based approach

FAO's key messages on biofuel development are:

- The sustainability of biofuels is context specific. Therefore its assessment must be based on reality not models and global studies;
- Tools and knowledge are now available to help governments and operators reduce risks and enhance opportunities of biofuel development;
- Per se biofuels are neither good nor bad. What matters is the way they are managed;
- Biofuels should be seen as another opportunity for responsible investment in sustainable agriculture, rural development and bio economy.

Biography:

Olivier Dubois is senior natural resources officer and coordinator of the energy programme of FAO. An Agronomist, land use and natural resource management specialist, he has a Masters in Agronomy, Certificates in Tropical Agriculture, Rural Economics and Sociology from the Faculty of Agronomy of Gembloux, Belgium, and a Masters in Environmental Management from the European Community Environment Programme. Mr Dubois has worked on land use intensification, forest management and institutional aspects of rural development in more than 40 countries in Africa, Asia-South Pacific, Latin America, the Middle East and CIS countries, through both long term assignments, and several short term missions.