

Jatropha in Zambia, A Snapshot from 2011

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This paper looks at the current challenges of biofuel production in Africa, through the case of Zambia. It describes the current state of biofuels production in Zambia with a focus on the main biofuel crop Jatropha. The paper describes how the feed stock is produced, by who is it produced, at what cost and to what benefit. It looks at the various models that exist in Zambia, from individual farming, to outgrower schemes and larger plantations. It looks at the various uses of Jatropha, from using the oil straight in rural communities, to fuelling industries such as mining and commercial farming, to the potential of national blending mandates for the transport system and lastly, what is the role of biofuel exports. The overall description is a biofuel industry that is growing, with difficulties. It is a mesh of actors and a mesh of directions. Jatropha is a picture of uncertainties. There are rumours that Jatropha will destroy soils, or that buyers will disappear. There are poor extension services, and few 'facts' to spread. There are complaints around the price. How should a sustainable price be set? How could a market be created? There are projections stating that blending ratios could be met, and consultancy reports stating that the yields in Zambia are still too low to reach even a percentage of the biodiesel use in the country. There are statements that land is not an issue, and court cases proving the contrary. There are changes in the Chinese attempts to capture land, from trying to lease large tracts to leasing scattered areas in various chiefdoms. This paper tries to describe the 'real' picture of biofuel development in Africa, and how actors at various levels and different institutions try to grasp with this 'reality'. This includes the question whether the global trend of biofuel expansion is turning into a local opportunity for poor people. It includes that question that many actors ask themselves, should Jatropha be promoted or abandoned. The overriding issue is on whose terms biofuels will develop in Africa.