

Catherine Rhodes

Paper title

INTERNATIONAL POWER INEQUALITIES IN THE CONSEQUENCES AND CONTROL OF THE BIOTECHNOLOGY REVOLUTION

Abstract

One of the key roles required of international regulation of biotechnology is the promotion of capacity-building to reduce inequalities in the distribution of benefits and negative impacts. However, international regulation often acts to entrench existing power systems, so it is questionable whether it can achieve this goal.

There are a variety of issue areas in which the biotechnology revolution has significant applications and impacts and in which there is a need for international regulation to coordinate state action. This paper will primarily focus on two of these areas – environmental protection and trade – to explore the importance of international power relationships to both how the consequences of the revolution are likely to be distributed and how they will be controlled.

These areas of international regulation display a divergence of principles combined with an imbalance in strength that currently appears to be favouring the promotion of free trade as the main driver for this area. This reflects the interests of powerful states in the international systems and the maintenance of their position.

There is awareness of the power disparities within international regulatory systems and less powerful states can group together to try to affect these systems, and have had some recent success in doing so. However, these successes remain limited and it is clear that in a system that is as inherently political as the international legal system, the advantage will remain with the already powerful states for the foreseeable future. Only if these states can be persuaded that it is also in their interests to meet the needs of less powerful states, will a shift occur. This is a great concern in the area of biotechnology because although it has great potential to bring global benefits, in the current context it is likely to further exacerbate inequalities.

Biography:

I am a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Bradford Disarmament Research Centre. I completed my PhD “Assessing the coherence of the international regulatory response to the challenges and opportunities of modern biotechnology” in August 2006. My background is in International Relations, and I have been based in the Department of Peace Studies for the last seven years. My current research interests are the consequences of the biotechnology revolution and its governance at the international level, particularly in terms of how it might be improved. I have also worked on European Union regulation of biotechnology.

Institutional Affiliation

Bradford Disarmament Research Centre