

## Soft Law and Scientific Uncertainty: the case of New & Emerging Issues at the Convention on Biological Diversity

*Debby Scott*

I study the production of global governance of emerging techno-scientific objects. My research uses the treatment of biofuels and synthetic biology within the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as a case study of how varying kinds of scientific uncertainty are dealt with in the process of developing global mechanisms of governance. A significant part of my data collection occurs through participant observation at CBD negotiations – taking copious notes and pictures, following up with negotiators and participants for interviews, and understanding the evolution of documents through rounds of revisions. Social scientists undertaking ethnography usually spend significant amounts of time in the field, studying the relationships and cultural intricacies of a place. I'm part of a community of scholars exploring how to adapt ethnographic tools to meaningfully study short-lived but highly important events, such as international negotiations.

In addition to attending negotiations, I have also spent 3 months at the Secretariat of the CBD in Montreal, producing documentation and analysis on synthetic biology for the next rounds of negotiations. (The drafts are open for comment, and available at <http://cbd.int/emerging>.) By studying the processes by which international environmental policy is made – looking at how scientific knowledge is used, whose voices are heard, and how uncertainties and risks are described – we can explore how those decision-making processes could be improved.



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