

“Renewable Energy Governance in the International System: The Role of International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) in Advancing the Global Energy Transition”

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Abstract

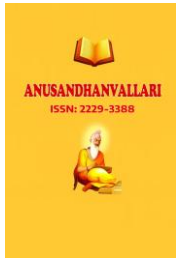
The initiative to shift to renewable energy is a powerful reaction against climate change. These transitions are not only a need but also an emergency in efficient energy security as well as sustainable development. The changing size of international institutions have a very important role in the formation of norms and cooperation. The objective of this paper is to discuss the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and how it is governed within the international system. Under the conceptual and analytic strategy, this paper will examine the roles played by IRENA in fostering diffusion of renewable energy norms. The support network towards the member states on knowledge production and capacity building will be reviewed in the existing government structures. It presents the argument of a deficit in enforcement visibility by IRENA and emphasizes more on ad-hoc environments and weak government actions. Through an institutional role analysis of IRENA, the paper has added a wider discussion within the international relation field on the topic of global governance, the effectiveness of institutions, and political aspect of the energy transitions, which influence how states behave over time.

Keywords: Renewable Energy; Global Governance; IRENA; Energy Transition; International Institutions; Climate Governance

Introduction

The global energy transition cannot be overestimated in the modern international relations. As the climate alters, the issue of renewables is no longer taken as a periphery issue in the environment but as one that has taken centre stage in the global governance. Other markets and other technological states have had some past energy transition. The great move towards renewables is, and will remain, heavily conditioned by the assorted political constructions of the world akin to global governing institutions, treaties, and rival-political goals. Renewable energy is also influenced by its governance in terms of unequal development of the world, unequal distribution of power, and geographic tension.

International organisations put the concept of renewable energy in place and they make the energy a global issue and no longer merely country-local policies. The world climate and energy governance institutions work hand in hand with IRENA which is among the few institutions in the world dedicated to energy transition to renewable energy. One of the latest international organisations is IRENA which was created in 2009 as it helps and encourages member states to switch to a sustainable energy system. It supports and offers technical assistance and power cooperation using cooperation platforms. IRENA is also based on knowledge sharing and capacity building unlike other international organisations.



Nevertheless, the vacuity is still present on what IRENA actually does to state behaviour and which types of governance can be provided. In this paper, I contend that IRENA is soft influence and it influences the outcome of renewable energy through agenda setting and norm formation rather than coercion. In analyzing the role of Irena in global energy, the paper aims at making contributions to the international relations, and its discussion on cooperation, power and politics of global energy transition.

Renewable Energy and Global Governance: An International Relations Perspective

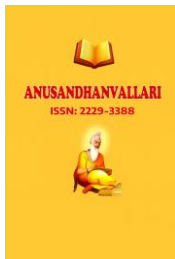
Renewable energy has become a popular concept of global governance, rather than a nationally based energy policy issue. In this regard, the increasing status of climate change, energy security and sustainable development as concerns on the international agenda has seen the management of the energy systems to go beyond the national energy policy-making processes to include international organizations, transnational networks and non-state actors. Thus, the prism of the International Relations follows this to more general changes in world governance that diffuse sources of power at the expense of the sovereign state (Held, 1999).

The national interests, geopolitics with regard to energy resources, and energy security were the major factors behind the traditional form of energy policy-making. But with the recent changes in the renewable energy, another kind of politics in energy policy making has been created. Renewable energy is regarded as a vital part of the global-level of public goods and therefore calls upon collaboration in the dissemination of energy resources, which involves a new form of governance, which entails coordination, sharing of information, and promotion, but not regulation (Goldthau, A., & Sovacool, B. K., 2012).

According to the literature on global governance, institutions have the capacity and opportunity to assist to resolve the issue of collective action in cases where unilateral action is inadequate. The issue of climate change and shift to new energy sources is nothing but that. Nations could know about long-term benefits of using new energy sources, but they also encounter such challenges as short-term economic burdens and political restrictions at home. These barriers can be alleviated by international institutions through enhancing provision of information, avenue to learning and assisting to set expectations on what to do in the event of the problem (Keohane, R. O., & Nye Jr, J. S., 1973).

Additionally, the norm formation is highly conditioned in the field of renewable energy in the constructivist view. The norms of sustainability and climate change have become valid norms via internationalised discourses and advocacy on the international institution level. The norms significantly influence the understanding and determination of the interests and policy choices as formulated by the states. This is despite the fact that it exists in the absence of enforcement mechanisms (Finnemore, M., and Sikkink, K., 1998). Renewable energy is not only a solution, but it is a formulation of which the actions of the state are evaluated.

Nevertheless, inequalities continue to exist in the governance of renewable energy in the world, in which developing nations are experiencing obstacles in the form of finance, technology and infrastructure, which prevents them to shift to renewable energy. Conversely, developed countries do not lack a lot to meet such demands. In this regard, Scholars hold in the opinions of international political economists so long as these imbalances are not countered, the energy transition in the international scene may continue to create inequality (Newell, P., and Paterson, M., 2010). This brings out the political aspects of the governance of renewable energy and the necessity of institutional processes that enable fair participation. Hence, the creation of certain international institutions that are concerned with the regulation of renewable energies is, per se, a significant modification in the international system. Unlike in the case of climate change governance, they are not obligatory but seek to shape the behavior of the actors by exercising the authority of expert knowledge and policy transfer.



The role of institutions, norms, and power, therefore, informs an International Relations perspective of renewable energy governance.

Institutional Origins and Mandate of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)

The creation of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) indicates the major change in the international community attitude to the governance of energy. Since the global energy cooperation depended heavily on the dominated institutions which were fossil fuel based. True renewable energy schemes did not have a special institutional platform at international levels. The establishment of IRENA was explicitly aware of the fact that renewable energy needed different governance structure in comparison to more traditional energy institutions because renewable energy necessitated more sophisticated norms to literally address the issues concerning climate change.

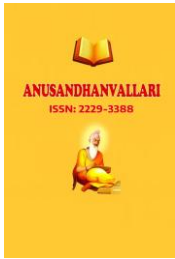
This was the aim of IRENA to assist countries to switch toward the sustainable energy systems. Also, it encourages the use of renewable energy technologies. But, IRENA lacks regulation and enforcement. Instead, it works through policy advice and capacity building. Its best motives among the member states are the data generation and establishment of cooperation. The indicated design of institutions is the manifestation of the fact that coercive regulation is not obligatory, and it becomes essential to decrease information and financial costs to adopt it (Transformation, G. E., 2019)

The creation of IRENA is found in wider arguments over international relations. The debates surround with regime complexities with its institutional specialisation. As the global governance continues to expand, new institutions have been born that are specializing in particular spheres of policies that are yet to be addressed by the current authorities. The energy dimension of IRENA is a supplement rather than a rival of other institutions such as UNFCCC. Division of labour in the modern global governance has taken root in the global network and not some comprehensive regimes (Abbott, K. W., & Snidal, D., 2010).

Thus, another increasing membership remains an example of growing relevance of IRENA in the global system. Since its inception, the IRENA has achieved almost perfect membership, which comprise the developing and developed states with distinct energy portfolio and policy needs. It is in this regard that the greater membership serves to enhance its legitimacy which consequently makes it effective as a dialogue site despite the North-South cleavages. But in other aspects, its heterogeneous membership becomes a constraint to its own policy prescriptions, which becomes even more consensual and advisory (Colgan, J. D., Keohane, R. O., and Van de Graaf, T., 2012).

The development and publication of expert knowledge on the trends, cost, and routes of renewable energy source development is also a part of IRENA mandate. This affects how a state considers the feasibility and desirability of the process of converting to renewable energy sources. A case therefore, can be presented to the idea that IRENA affects the policies that states pursue in the field by employing epistemic power which is the utilization of expertise to influence the preferences of governments, especially when the policy under consideration is highly technologically complex and uncertain (Haas, P. M., 1992).

It is the institutional design that enables IRENA to enjoy such wide appeal that, in its turn, places a ceiling on its ability to change at high speed. It is not enforced by any specific mechanisms or by any binding commitments and hence its performance will be predicated on how well states internalise its recommendations. This tension summarizes one of the main tension in the IRENA mandate: since it is well-placed to promote cooperation and learning, the actual effects will be in domestic political decisions and larger international circumstances.



IRENA as a Soft Governance Actor in the Global Energy Transition

In the contemporary international system, the power of numerous international institutions is not attributable to their formal authority and is rather a product of their ability to affect norms, expectations, and policy preference. The International Renewable Energy Agency is a good example of this form of governance. Even though it does not exercise any enforcement powers, its soft governance is powerful. Where knowledge production, instructions on policy and facilitating cooperation is still in mainstream. As deep as this is the case, it is not sufficient to measure the institution effectiveness, Rather the significant change agent through expertise and normative leadership must be analysed.

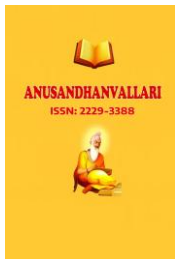
The most notable characteristic of IRENA is its source of knowledge that is authoritative on renewable energy. IRENA has been significant in making renewable energy seem as a normal perception in that it is ecologically essential, as well as, economically feasible, through its cost trajectory, deployment pathway, and, long-term energy scenario reports. Such influence is aligned with that which scholars of International Relations call epistemic governance whereby expert knowledge shapes the policy choice by informing the formulation of problematic scenarios and the articulation of viable solutions. IRENA has been consistently introducing renewable as the key to energy security and development that resulted in the re-working of state predications overtime (Haas, P. M., 1992).

Moreover, IRENA plays a crucial agenda-setting role in the energy and climate governance process worldwide, other than the generation of knowledge. What is remarkable is that the policy analysis conducted by IRENA is frequently referred to in other circles and discussions concerning the policy. Even though, IRENA does not set policy, its projected positioning is that renewable energy is a base. It is on it that sustainable development is anchored, and how it is an important constituent of a new standard that might be viewed as a new standard on energy transition and growth. This role is especially important in the governance systems that experience fragmented authority and the mechanism of persuasion is a key coordination mechanism (Abbott, K. W., and Snidal, D., 2010).

Capacity building is another important designation of the soft governance mandate of IRENA. The organisation focuses on developing nations and helps its member nations to deal with structural problems that may hinder the adoption of renewable energy. Therefore, rather than designing a legally binding requirement, an initiative aimed at emphasizing the institutional implications of deficit in proper expertise, such a move may be considered a positive one in terms of global governance by pointing to the shift towards the establishment of international cooperation, as opposed to compliance (Bulkeley et al., 2014).

The studies of renewable energy have also raised the issue of the diplomatic and normative aspects of governance, particularly with regard to the emerging world economies. At this, IRENA and such agencies are not regarded only as technical actors. But also as arenas where states bargain on their right to the leadership in climate change and energy transformation. This manner permits the collaborating states to link power diplomacy to the larger plans of global positioning on the climate matters (Kanwat, 2024). This is in order to highlight the politics of the work of IRENA.

Nevertheless, the focus on soft forms of governance also generates some constraints. To begin with, the success of IRENA rests on the political goodwill of the members to follow its direction. Though, the membership base is almost universal, it presents a constraint also. The wide approval makes the efficacy conditional on the capability or the desire to assume a stance that can displease influential players. Therefore, its performance is also exposed to various situations, depending on domestic politics, money availability, and geopolitical environments too (Newell, P., Pattberg, P., & Schroeder, H., 2012).



On the whole, the performance of IRENA as a form of soft governance practices provides validation of the possibilities and constraints of the soft form of governance in responding to critical issues of the world society. The contribution of the work of IRENA to the energy revolution in the world can be positive and significant. The experience it has had also highlights the broad limitations of international institutions and their efforts in areas where political power remains nationally decentralised and relies on national political choices.

Limits and Critiques of IRENA's Role in Global Energy Governance

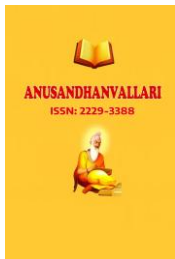
There are restrictions, in terms of the degree of visibility and membership to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) as compared to global energy governance. The main weaknesses are actually reflective of various problems that international institutions have. In regards to the problem of decentralised governance, the political level of intervention is particular to a nation-state. When it comes to discussing an assessment of IRENA role, there are a number of factors, which are connected to its effectiveness and which should be viewed as key domains of interest. This is especially so given the fact that there is no enforcement authority of member states by IRENA. IRENA is not based on binding the member states, as in other international agreements. Moreover, IRENA solely uses persuasion in order to create change in the development of renewable energy. The scholars state that the international institutions find it difficult when the demands of the state and international politics are not intersecting. The actual challenge is that to create any pressure on any form to the state (Victor, D. G., 2011).

The issue of finances is also an added challenge to the role of IRENA especially among developing countries. IRENA is very instrumental in such cases whereby it offers policy guidance and expertise to the developing countries. Nonetheless, it lacks major financial resources at its disposal to support large-scale energy transitions. Brokerage of access to finance remains done by multilateral development banks and bilateral donors. Such formatting also reduces the possibility of IRENA bridging strategy and outcome and implies that the gap between the intended capacity and policy intent will persist (Pickering et al., 2017). Thus, as long as there are no more institutional connections to climate financing mechanisms and actors, the renewable energy governance is still not evenly developed at regional levels.

Geopolitical Dynamics is another characteristic that determines the extent of influence of IRENA. The idea of renewable energy is conceived as a world civic interest. This "interest" is gradually becoming mixed with the fight of states on their technological, supply, and leadership positions. The world powers are considering renewable energy as an alternative not only due to its green advantage, but also to gain economic and geopolitical benefits. These forces restrict the potential of multilateral collaboration and the level of encouragement that the institutions might take to encourage authentic mutual strategies in the transformation of energy (Goldthau, A., and Westphal, K., 2019).

The other concern is the representation and agenda-setting issue concerning the energy governance at the international level. Even though IRENA is a heterogeneous membership, the power of decision-making in this institution remains as a set of pre-existing spheres of specialization. Such power dominance is determined by the financial ability, as well as, the geopolitical reach. As an illustration, poorer and less developed nations can have the advantage of technical help. However they are relegated to the periphery as far as the matters of setting the larger agenda are concerned. Therefore, it can be questioned as to the representativeness of a renewable energy governance model, not only in the context of equity and justice issues as applied to the energy transition in general (Newell, P., and Mulvaney, D., 2013).

Finally, IRENA depends heavily on the larger climate governance systems to be effective. As already indicated, the shift towards renewable energy is just a part, or a segment, of a larger climate policy, and IRENA cannot affect it. In this way, IRENA cannot control such effectiveness. Therefore, the role and influence of IRENA, which can



be as great as possible, are integrated into a disjointed system. There is a lack of coordination in this system on a broad level. Again, this highlights the need to consider IRENA as a part of a bigger ecosystem and not in isolation as a remedy to global energy dilemma.

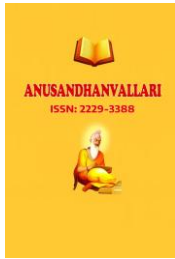
Conclusion

The stands of global lift in renewable energies is one of the most striking changes currently in the modern international system. This is examined by considering IRENA as an international institution in this paper. IRENA mission is to promote the idea of developing renewable energy by the theories of international relations. There are particularly global governance theories and institutional power that are useful in shaping categories of IRENA. These findings of the research point to a significant input of IRENA. i.e the rebranding of renewable energy as a major aspect in world-wide endeavors to combat climate change. The solution of the problem of climate changes, the energy security and development issues can be seen as such contributions. To date, the effects of IRENA are still within the political environment of the country. Budgetary reforms and geopolitical factors still constitute the key limitations to the possibility of voluntary cooperation. The example of IRENA shows the opportunities and constraints of soft governance. to deal with complex global issues, soft governance would be a key instrument, especially in an environment where there are divergent interests.

Rather than trying to evaluate IRENA in terms of the influence it has on its policy, this paper will provide an argument in favor of debating its purpose. Seeing as one of a broader range of institutional arrangements, aiding a gradual change with time is beyond containment. With the global issues of climate change and energy rising in degree and intensity, the success of these organisations working well will be a point to consider especially in the sphere associated with financial instruments, political interests domestically and the new kind of geopolitical conflict. Renewable energy is one of the most important spheres, arguably, when determining the dynamic nature of international cooperation in the twenty-first century.

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