

Anatomy of an International Norm Entrepreneur

The Friends of Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform

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9.1 Introduction

Within the fossil fuel subsidy reform literature to date, little attention has been paid to the role of informal transgovernmental networks in promoting what might be regarded as an emerging fossil fuel subsidy reform norm at the international level (see also Chapter 5). A coalition of nine non-Group of 20 (G20) countries known as the Friends of Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform (FFFSR) is a prominent example. The FFFSR has been variously described as a ‘norm entrepreneur’ (Rive 2016),¹ ‘ginger group’ (Gerasimchuk and Zamudio 2012: 5) and ‘influential epistemic community’ (Interview 2). Since 2010, the group has been active both publicly and behind the scenes in a range of activities and contexts ostensibly directed towards the stated objective ‘to support implementation of the existing commitment made by G20 Leaders in Pittsburgh in September 2009 to “rationalise and phase-out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies”’ (NZMFAT 2010: 2).

This chapter subjects the background, approach and strategies of the FFFSR to scrutiny. Drawing on constructivist-influenced frameworks for analysing international norm development, the analysis focuses on three aspects of the norm emergence cycle: (1) the framing of fossil fuel subsidies and fossil fuel subsidy reform, (2) the securing of support of state and non-state actors and (3) the strategic use of expertise and information to influence the behaviour of other states.

An analysis of the role and approach of the FFFSR in framing fossil fuel subsidies and subsidy reform confronts a perennial definitional issue – that is, whether and how to categorise particular subsidies and classes of subsidies as ‘inefficient’ and therefore in need of phasing out. The analysis also confronts another issue that has caught the attention of some sections of the international community: whether in the process of framing and addressing undesirable fossil fuel subsidies, *production* subsidies ought to be treated any differently from

¹ On norm entrepreneurs in the climate change context generally, see Abbott (2014).

consumption subsidies. As discussed by Rive (2016), an examination of that issue reveals fault lines among the international community (and conceivably within the FFFSR and its associated networks) which, if unaddressed, may impede ongoing progress in reform.

Viewed from the perspective of Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998: 895) 'norm life-cycle' hypothesis, the activities of the FFFSR over the period 2010–17 can be broadly seen as reflecting the behaviour of a norm entrepreneur in stage 1 (norm emergence) and early stage 2 (norm cascade). Stage 1 of the norm life-cycle centres on a norm entrepreneur with an organisational platform as the primary actor, using persuasion as its dominant mechanism for influence (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 898). By stage 2, actors involved in the emergent norm diffusion have expanded to include states, international organisations and networks (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 902). Dominant mechanisms of influence during this stage are socialisation, institutionalisation and demonstration. As the following account illustrates, the FFFSR have paid particular attention to the cognitive framing of fossil fuel subsidy reform and have extensively used 'expertise and information to change the behaviour of other actors' (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 899). The FFFSR have also had some degree of success in securing the overt support of both state and non-state actors as part of a wider project aimed ultimately at socialising, embedding and internalising fossil fuel subsidy reform as a norm at the international and domestic levels.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, the nature of 'friends' coalitions is examined. The origins and drivers for the FFFSR are explored, leading into a discussion of membership. The matter of framing is then considered, followed by the strategic use of expertise and information to influence the behaviour of other actors. The final substantive section reviews the extent to which the initiative has had discernible influence on domestic practices and is followed by a brief assessment and conclusions.

9.2 Friends Groups in Global Governance

Friends groups have been part of the policy development and negotiating landscape within international trade, development, environment and disarmament contexts for many years. By their nature, such groups are flexible, dynamic and generally unhindered by formal constitutional structures. O'Malley (2014:10) defines 'Friends groups' as 'coalition[s] of like-minded participants trying to influence group members and outside actors of the proper path forward to solve a problem using their own national interests as a guide'.

Friends groups operating within the World Trade Organization context include the Friends of Anti-Dumping Negotiations, Friends of Special Products (in

agriculture negotiations), Friends of Ambition (Non-Agricultural Market Access), Really Good Friends in Services and Friends of Fish (WTO 2016). Friends groups have also been operational and effective in the international peace advocacy context as well as within international climate negotiations (Prantl 2005; Whitfield 2007; Kjellén 2010).

Although these types of Friends groups typically engage and cooperate with a variety of non-state actors (including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), corporations and intergovernmental organisations), their core membership is at the state level. Such groups thus can be seen as transgovernmental networks, defined by Slaughter (2004: 14) as ‘a pattern of regular and purposive relations among like government units working across the borders that divide countries from one another and that demarcate the “domestic” from the “international” sphere’. Referring to both Keohane and Nye (1974) and Slaughter (2004), Raustiala (2003) observes that transgovernmental networks ‘involve specialised domestic officials directly interacting with each other, often with minimal supervision by foreign ministries. They are “networks” because this cooperation is based on loosely structured, peer-to-peer ties developed through frequent interaction rather than formal negotiation.’ Although they differ in emphasis and context, the descriptions of transgovernmental networks described by Keohane and Nye, Slaughter, and Raustiala all apply to the FFFSR. The group can also be conceptualised as a ‘minilateral’ initiative (van Asselt 2014: 83) or ‘climate club’ (Weischer et al. 2012), increasingly regarded as important elements of the evolving international climate change regime complex (Keohane and Victor 2011).

Unlike more formally established intergovernmental organisations or formal negotiating blocs, the effectiveness of Friends groups on international norm and policy development and negotiations largely does not depend on securing and wielding political ‘hard’ power, such as the use of a larger state’s market access to ‘encourage’ entry into a particular environmental agreement (for an example in the whaling context, see Hirata 2005: 132). Instead, it depends on their ability to network, influence, innovate, problem solve and profile raise. Slaughter regards such entities as integral to no less than a ‘new world order’. In terms that have particular resonance for the nine (all non-G20) members of the FFFSR, she suggests that ‘[i]n a world in which their ability to use their hard power is often limited, governments must be able to exploit the uses of soft power: the power of persuasion and information’ (Slaughter 2004: 4).²

² For an alternative (and more sceptical) assessment of the influence of transgovernmental networks, see Anderson (2005).

At their best, Friends groups have the capacity to catalyse policy development in bureaucratic and complex negotiating environments, enabling normative leaps in processes typically limited to slow, incremental change. However, like other informal forms of normative development, questions arise about transparency, legitimacy and the consistency of adopted strategies with broader principles of international law (Young 2011). It is appropriate – as in this chapter and in other analyses by the author (Rive 2016) – to subject the objectives and strategies of Friends groups to the same kind of scrutiny given to the negotiations towards policy and rule development in ‘harder’ international contexts.

9.3 Origins of and Drivers for the Friends of Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform

Attempts to discern and analyse underlying state motivations for adopting particular foreign policy positions – in this case, to initiate or join an international coalition of countries explicitly focused on the elimination of ‘inefficient’ fossil fuel subsidies – are inevitably challenging. In some instances, statements by senior officials or other state representatives are publically available that may shed some light on the factors influencing decisions to be part of the FFFSR.³ However, even when such statements are available, they need to be carefully scrutinised.

Nevertheless, it is useful to pay attention to domestic and international political and economic drivers for particular state involvement in an international fossil fuel subsidy reform project for at least two reasons. The first is that understanding what has motivated New Zealand and other countries to position themselves internationally as fossil fuel subsidy reformers may highlight factors and considerations directly relevant to the recruitment of other countries to the cause. The second reason (drawing on theories of norm emergence and diffusion referred to earlier) is that the effectiveness of the international norm entrepreneur on this policy – as on others – will depend at least in part on a perception of authenticity and credibility of position. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998: 904) note that ‘[b]ecause much norm advocacy involves pointing to discrepancies between words and actions and holding actors personally responsible for adverse consequences of their actions, one way to think about norm entrepreneurs is that they provide the information and publicity that provoke cognitive dissonance among norm violators’. It follows that if the norm entrepreneurs themselves are perceived as either disingenuous (in part or whole) in their role as norm advocates and/or are themselves regarded as

³ The most extensive record of the ostensible reasoning for the New Zealand government’s decision to launch the FFFSR is contained in Cabinet briefing papers supplied to the author in 2013 in response to a request under New Zealand’s Official Information Act 1982. The papers are discussed in more detail in Rive (2016).

demonstrating ‘discrepancies between words and actions’, their effectiveness may be impeded. A similar point is made by Andresen and Agrawala (2002: 42), who, when examining the function of different forms of leadership in the climate regime, observe: ‘[c]heap and symbolic action does not qualify as leadership in this sense; some sacrifice has to be made to make it credible.’

The FFFSR was launched and is led by New Zealand, a small (population 4.6 million) member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with an economy heavily reliant on agricultural exports and tourism. The country has received acclaim from some quarters for having relatively successfully implemented domestic subsidy reform and economic restructuring (including, but not limited to, the agricultural sector; Tyndall 2015). Generally, it is regarded as having adopted a proactive and engaged stance on selected areas of economic, environmental and security concerns at the global level since at least as early as the mid-twentieth century (Kennaway 1999; Oram 2007).

So what were the factors and influences that led New Zealand to embark on the Friends initiative? The initial impetus for the initiative appears to have been the 2009 G20 Pittsburgh Leaders’ Statement committing G20 members ‘to phase out and rationalise over the medium term inefficient fossil fuel subsidies while providing targeted support for the poorest’ (G20 2009; see also APEC 2009). New Zealand Cabinet papers show that planning for the launch of the FFFSR commenced in the months after the Pittsburgh Statement, culminating in a public launch in Paris in June 2010 (NZMFAT 2010: 3). At the launch, Vangelis Vitalis, who was then the New Zealand Deputy High Commissioner to Australia, announced New Zealand’s intention ‘to help and support the G20 in [its] endeavour on the reform of fossil fuel subsidies’ for which ‘setting up this group is an important step’ (Vitalis 2010). From the outset, the initiative was intended as a forum for non-G20 countries (NZMFAT 2010), and it has maintained that membership criterion – understood as necessary to allow effective independent lobbying of G20 countries and the G20 grouping – as it has evolved.

New Zealand government announcements on the initiative have emphasised two main drivers for New Zealand’s decision to convene the FFFSR. The first was a desire for (other) countries to benefit from the fiscal advantages of reducing public spending on fossil fuel energy subsidies, including the freeing up of public funds for other priority policy objectives such as health and education. The second concerned environmental and climate change benefits, which have increasingly been associated with fossil fuel subsidy reform (NZMFAT 2010). These reasons align with a broader and long-standing strategy for New Zealand to position itself internationally as environmentally conscious and a proactive, engaged and responsible global citizen (Kennaway 1999; Oram 2007).

The 2010 New Zealand Cabinet papers highlight other underlying objectives that are not so obviously aligned with New Zealand's international positioning strategy. Among them is the country's aim to help secure stronger international disciplines for the limiting of agricultural subsidies in key overseas markets (Rive 2016). It is acknowledged that in this respect, New Zealand's mixed motives for its leadership role in the FFFSR are neither unusual for any significant foreign policy venture, nor do they necessarily undermine the utility of the project. However, if the underlying motivation for the initiative is at least in part different from the professed drivers, that is relevant to a political economy analysis of the activities of the FFFSR as well as an informed assessment of its norm-building endeavours.

9.4 Securing Support of State and Non-State Actors

As observed by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), a feature of the first stage of the norm emergence process is securing the support of other state and non-state actors. In the case of the FFFSR, while the process has been iterative and is still evolving, it has involved two main phases. The first was the process of New Zealand securing additional members of the core Friends group. The second phase involved expanding the circle of overt (but necessarily more diffused) support by state and non-state actors through the 2015 Fossil-Fuel Subsidy Reform Communiqué.

9.4.1 Expansion of the Friends Membership

At its launch in November 2010, New Zealand named only one other country as a founding member of the FFFSR: Sweden. However, it made clear that additional members would be recruited, provided that they met the criteria of being 'serious, credible, countries that share our interest in a high-ambition and transparent outcome from the G20 on the reform of fossil fuel subsidies' (Vitalis 2010).

Over the following 12 months, six additional countries joined the group so that, by the end of 2011, membership had grown to eight: Costa Rica, Denmark, Ethiopia, Finland, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland (IISD 2011). Figure 9.1 shows the current members of the FFFSR (including Uruguay, which joined in April 2016), highlighting overlapping memberships over a number of formal and informal organisations and groupings.

Figure 9.1 shows several significant common memberships, reflecting the tendency of relationships developed through existing networks to be leveraged into additional alliances through personal contacts. The largest membership grouping

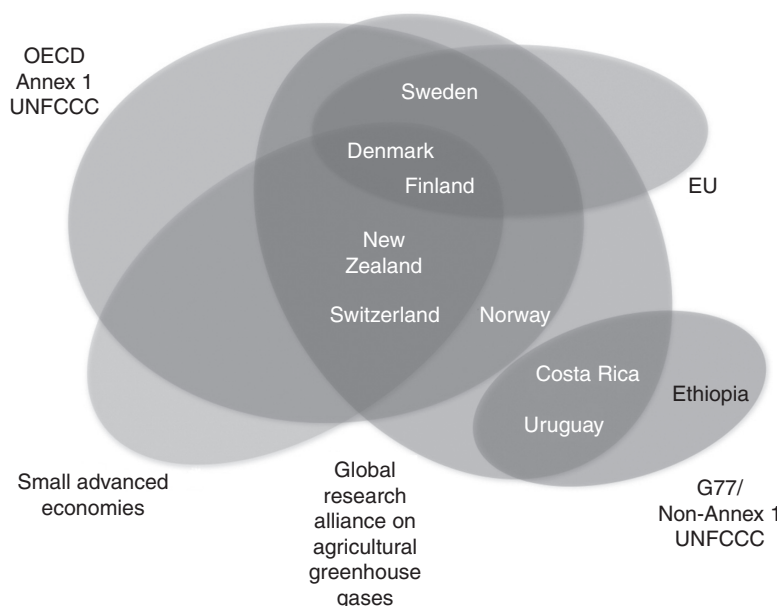


Figure 9.1 Overlapping member groupings of the Friends of Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform

(Source: Created by the author based on a figure from Gerasimchuk and Zamudio (2012: 4).)

within the FFFSR belongs to the Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases, another New Zealand-led initiative launched in December 2009 ‘focused on research, development and extension of technologies and practices that will help deliver ways to grow more food (and more climate-resilient food systems) without growing greenhouse gas emissions’ (GRA 2017). The membership of Costa Rica and Uruguay – which are relative ‘outsiders’ compared to the group of OECD/small advanced economy grouping – might be partly explained by the existing connections with the Global Research Alliance.⁴

The next-largest membership is that of the OECD: six of nine members are developed countries (also listed in Annex II to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)). Within the six OECD members is a significant subgroup of Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) – regarded by at least some commentators (alongside the European Union more generally) as proven norm entrepreneurs on environmental and other areas of international policy and therefore potentially seen as natural members of a progressive coalition on fossil fuel subsidy reform (e.g. Lawler 1997;

⁴ Of course, the demonstrated interest in fossil fuel subsidy reform is also a significant factor for membership of ‘outlier’ countries such as Costa Rica, Ethiopia and Uruguay.

Ingebritsen 2002; see also Bandarage 2010). Four members are part of the Small Advanced Economies Initiative, an international working group comprising Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Israel, New Zealand, Singapore and Switzerland (Small Advanced Economies Initiative 2017).

The minority sub-grouping of Costa Rica, Uruguay and Ethiopia, which are all members of the Group of 77 and non-Annex I members of the UNFCCC, stand apart from the six OECD members. Of these three, as already noted, Costa Rica and Uruguay were already part of the Global Research Alliance, leaving Ethiopia as the outlier. But Ethiopia's presence within the FFFSR can be explained by its interest in and commitment to fossil fuel subsidy reform (Sintayehu 2014), as well as the credibility and balance it provides in what might otherwise be regarded (at least in relation to the six OECD members) as an elite 'club'.⁵

9.4.2 Taking the Project Wider: The FFFSR Communiqué

Securing the support of a wider group of state actors (including key influencers or gatekeepers), as well as obtaining the support of key non-state actors, can be a significant factor in the effective diffusion and uptake of emerging norms (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). By early 2015, the FFFSR had expanded its membership to eight (as noted earlier, Uruguay joined in 2016) and had successfully contributed to arrangements for piloting voluntary peer review exercises within the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the G20. A natural next step would be to seek broader endorsement for the project beyond the core group of non-G20 members from a wider circle of state and non-state actors. The landmark United Nations Climate Conference in Paris at the end of 2015 was an obvious high-profile launch pad for the initiative's expansion.

In April 2015, as part of the World Bank/International Monetary Fund (IMF) Spring Series meetings in Washington, DC, the FFFSR publicly released its Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform Communiqué (FFFSR, 2015). This aspirational vision statement, and commitment, is a further articulation of the emerging fossil fuel subsidy reform norm that the group seeks to advance. At the Washington launch, FFFSR representatives indicated that the document would be tabled at the Paris conference later that year. On 30 November 2015, the Communiqué was formally presented to UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres by New Zealand Prime Minister John Key.⁶

⁵ The 2010 briefing paper to the New Zealand Cabinet suggested that '[t]he consolidation of [FFFSR] membership, particularly to include non-OECD and APEC members, will be important for its credibility' (NZMFAT 2010: 2, emphasis added).

⁶ A webcast of the high-level event is available at <http://unfccc6.meta-fusion.com/cop21/events/2015-11-30-12-30-fffsr>.

The text of the communiqué is broadly consistent with the approach adopted in the 2009 G20 and APEC statements. The final paragraph of the statement invites ‘all countries, companies and civil society organisations to join us in supporting accelerated action to eliminate inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies in an ambitious and transparent manner as part of a major contribution to climate change mitigation’. Arguably, references to ‘elimination’ of fossil fuel subsidies represents progress compared to the G20 statement’s softer references to ‘phase out and rationalise’. The communiqué also makes explicit reference to the need for a timetable for implementing reforms; however, it does not suggest a timeframe itself.

The communiqué initiative is also important because of the number and range of state and non-state actors that have now openly endorsed a commitment to fossil fuel subsidy reform (in the case of G20 or APEC state actors, this is, of course, a *further* commitment). In this regard, the explicit endorsement of the communiqué by the United States is notable, as are the endorsements from key G20 states, including Canada, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, and from oil-, coal- and gas-producing states known to maintain appreciable levels of fossil fuel subsidies such as Malaysia and Mexico.

9.5 The Friends’ Framing of the Emergent Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform Norm

An important component of the norm emergence process theorised by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) is the act of ‘framing’ by norm entrepreneurs (see also Chapters 5 and 8). The process of framing is dynamic, iterative and frequently involves both the reframing of existing concepts and norms and the contestation with potentially opposing norms (Busby 2007). All these processes can be observed in relation to the FFFSR initiative.

The FFFSR is by no means the first group to take up the issue of the need to reform fossil fuel subsidies, nor to frame them as a pressing contemporary issue for action. At least as early as the 1970s, academics such as Hudson (1977) had identified and discussed the negative resource implications of energy subsidies. As climate change climbed global agendas in the 1980s and 1990s, the link between fossil fuel subsidies and increasing emissions became a focus of analysis by economists and policymakers (Steenblik and Wigley 1990; Anderson and McKibbin 1997).

Implicit in both the G20 and APEC statements is a reframing of a conception of fossil fuel subsidies as a legitimate government tool to enhance economic development, energy security and welfare into a normative conception that is broadly negative in fiscal and environmental terms. The potential for energy subsidies to be

used for the support of economically disadvantaged sections of the polity is recognised and guardedly affirmed ('while providing targeted support for the poorest'). It is also acknowledged that there may be some categories of fossil fuel subsidies which are 'efficient' and therefore acceptable.

As noted above, from the outset, the FFFSR explicitly and deliberately linked its objective and *raison d'être* to the G20 Pittsburgh Statement. In early material produced on behalf of the FFFSR, it was made clear that the coalition was not advocating for the elimination of *all* fossil fuel subsidies, but rather the reform of *inefficient* fossil fuel subsidies (NZMFAT, 2010). In this regard, and concerning the reframing of conceptions of fossil fuel subsidies generally, FFFSR adopted a position that reflected emerging trends within the G20 and APEC and was supported in particular by the International Energy Agency (IEA), OECD and other international organisations (e.g. IEA et al. 2010).

The FFFSR adopted two further framing strategies during the period 2010–14 that are notable. The first was an emphasis on the domestic fiscal opportunity costs of governments (particularly of developing countries) who devote significant volumes of public funds to fossil fuel subsidies rather than applying limited funds to more 'worthy' ends, such as public health facilities or education.⁷ The second was to focus on the negative climate change consequences of fossil fuel subsidies, a theme developed and repeated in every communication on the topic and prominent in the communiqué.

The G20, APEC and FFFSR all used the qualifier 'inefficient' in framing unacceptable fossil fuel subsidies, but an important observation is that no clear definition or explanation of what is meant by 'inefficient' has ever been identified, publicly at least. As a criterion, 'inefficient' is capable of having multiple meanings, and in public policy contexts it remains a highly flexible and contestable concept (Alexander 2009). In this regard, an emerging norm focused on the medium-term phase-out/rationalisation of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies shares an inherent degree of flexibility and ambiguity with other emergent norms at the international level, such as 'sustainable development'.⁸

As observed by Hadden and Seybert (2016) in their analysis of the trajectory of sustainable development as an evolving international norm, the 'shifting content'

⁷ As an example, during an official FFFSR side event at the 2012 Doha Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC, Martin Lidegaard, Minister of Climate, Energy and Buildings in Denmark, was quoted as saying that 'subsidies for fossil-fuel consumption in developing countries were estimated by the [IEA] to be \$523 billion in 2011, and global producer subsidies are estimated to be more than \$100 billion per year'. He went on to note 'that some governments spend more on fossil-fuel subsidies than they do on health and education combined' (GSI 2012).

⁸ Of course, there is (clearly deliberate) flexibility and ambiguity concerning other important components of the G20 commitment to fossil fuel subsidy reform, namely 'phase out and rationalise' (rather than 'eliminate') and 'over the medium term'.

of the norm is at once an explanation for its rapid diffusion but also its disappointing performance. A vague and flexible commitment is far easier to both sell and accept, but it inevitably carries the greater risk of disappointing levels of material change in policy and practice change.

9.6 Strategic Use of Expertise and Information to Influence the Behaviour of Other Actors

A further element of the early stages of the norm emergence cycle is the strategic use of information and expertise by norm entrepreneurs to influence other actors (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Scholars such as Payne (2001) offer more sophisticated theories of this aspect of the norm diffusion process than Finnemore and Sikkink, maintaining the ongoing relevance (and empirically observed use) of traditional ‘material’ levers as part of the process of persuasion, in addition to the inherent persuasive power of ideas and norms themselves. Payne (2001: 39) also invites attention to the ‘social process’ within which persuasion of actors is attempted or achieved, which in his view ‘almost certainly matters more than the content or framing of specific messages’ (see also Risse 2000). However, despite differences in emphasis, there is reasonable recognition (at least among constructivist-leaning theorists) of the role of strategic information and expertise sharing as part of norm diffusion in an increasingly globalised and interconnected world.

The FFFSR placed targeted dissemination of information and expertise at the heart of their strategy from the beginning (NZMFAT 2010: 7–8). Working closely with professionally qualified officials, diplomats and experienced ministers – and drawing on the skills of aligned NGOs such as the Geneva-based Global Subsidies Initiative (see Chapter 10) – the FFFSR have engaged in a programme of information and expertise sharing across a wide spectrum of forums, including the EU, G20, APEC, World Bank, IMF, UNFCCC and others.⁹

From official documents, public statements and discussions with individuals involved in strategy development and implementation of the FFFSR, it is apparent that from the outset there was clear recognition that the group would need to adopt a targeted and strategic approach to dissemination of its core messages, relying upon credible expertise and practical information as opposed to blunt diplomatic force. Indeed, this approach was the only realistic one available to New Zealand and the Friends, none of whom individually are able to exert significant influence on other major state or non-state actors through economic, military or other means.

⁹ For details of known FFFSR public engagements between 2010 and early 2016, see Rive (2016: 89).

Two notable initiatives in which the FFFSR have played a catalytic expert role have been the pilot peer-review processes recently launched within APEC and the G20. As convener of the FFFSR, New Zealand played a leading role in establishing the process for peer review of fossil fuel subsidies within APEC, volunteering along with Peru to participate in a first round of peer reviews completed in 2015 (APEC 2015; see also APEC 2014). The FFFSR have also played a part in promoting and technically supporting the voluntary peer review process within the G20 (FFFSR 2013), which resulted in a first round of reviews involving the United States and China in 2016. A second round involved Germany and Mexico (OECD 2016).

Part of the FFFSR's approach has been to take opportunities to present and engage with other actors on conceptual, economic and practical aspects of fossil fuel subsidy reform at events at which relevant actors would be present for other reasons. One such high-profile gathering of state officials, professionals, business representatives and members of civil society is the annual Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC. The FFFSR have organised or participated in dedicated side events on fossil fuel subsidy reform at every annual meeting since 2011 and have undoubtedly had opportunities for informal engagement with key players at those events (see also Chapter 8).¹⁰

9.7 What Impact Has the FFFSR Initiative Had at the Domestic and International Levels?

In 2013, one of the architects of the initiative, Vangelis Vitalis, professed that the initiative had been effective 'beyond [his] wildest dreams' (Interview 1). However, it is doubtful that he meant that there was then, or is now, clear evidence of material changes in domestic practices that can be *directly* attributed to the FFFSR activities.

No empirical analyses have been undertaken (or at least published) on the concrete impacts of the FFFSR activities, meaning that there is inevitably a degree of speculation involved in assessing the success of the venture. What can be said is that there have been material *procedural* advances at the international level that can be fairly linked to the ongoing advocacy and profile raising of the FFFSR. The securing of a wider network of state and non-state actor support through the Communiqué can be regarded as a material procedural achievement directly flowing from the FFFSR initiative. So too is the ushering in of a voluntary peer-review process for (self-selected) state fossil fuel subsidy practices within the G20 and APEC.

¹⁰ This can be considered an example of what Slaughter (2004: 13) describes as a 'vertical' network, in which an actor – in this case, a transgovernmental network – interacts with a supranational entity such as the UNFCCC, G20 and so on.

The voluntary peer reviews that have occurred so far fall short of explicit state commitments to the elimination of fossil fuel subsidies. However, frameworks are now in place within the G20 and APEC which may, in time, bear fruit. One reason for optimism in this regard is the constraining influence of transparency through voluntary peer-review processes – even if that influence, as Bianchi (2013: 5) puts it, plays ‘an accessory, secondary role’ to more direct normative obligations (see also Aldy 2017). The second reason – which also applies to membership of the FFFSR itself as well as signatory status under the Communiqué – is that various forms of public commitment to fossil fuel subsidy reform increase the scope for ‘rhetorical entrapment’ (Schimmelfennig 2001) by opening opportunities for domestic non-state actors to hold their state to account against the norm of subsidy reform.

An example of exactly this kind of NGO pressure was the widely reported ‘fossil of the day’ award to New Zealand at the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties in Paris in 2015 for ‘urging countries to phase out fossil fuel subsidies’ while maintaining production subsidies on the order of tens of millions of USD itself (Rive 2015). Criticism over inconsistency on the matter of production subsidies has not been limited to New Zealand. Concerns have also been raised with FFFSR’s apparent focus in published material and in international presentations on the (perceived) priority task of eliminating fossil fuel *consumption* subsidies in oil-, coal- and gas-producing developing countries while accommodating ongoing subsidisation of fossil fuel production within developed countries, including the OECD members of the FFFSR (Rive 2016).

The (admittedly narrow, but nevertheless material) criticisms that have been levelled at the FFFSR raise reasonable questions as to whether a ‘thicker’ process of engagement with a wide range of international and non-state actors would be appropriate. Such a process could address concerns about the consistency of FFFSR strategy with broader principles of international equity and, potentially, with the specific principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities’ that forms part of the UNFCCC and several other relevant international environmental legal frameworks.¹¹ At the time of writing, no alteration to the FFFSR approach in this regard is apparent. It remains to be seen how, if at all, the group will respond to expressions of concern.

9.8 Conclusion

This chapter has examined whether particular constructivist-influenced theories of norm emergence and contemporary scholarship on the role of transgovernmental

¹¹ On the issue of the need for ‘thicker’ forms of cooperation to enhance legitimacy in the context of ‘informal law’, see Pauwelyn et al. (2012: 512).

networks and ‘minilateral’ initiatives assist in understanding and assessing the role of the FFFSR in contributing to fossil fuel subsidy reform at the national and international levels. In material respects, the activities of the FFFSR reflect Finnemore and Sikkink’s conception of a norm entrepreneur through its theorised stage 1 (norm emergence) and early parts of stage 2 (norm cascade). The FFFSR’s strategy has included the successful securing of the support of state and non-state actors, achieved in the first instance through the managed expansion of the Friends’ core state membership and subsequently the wider engagement with state and non-state actors through its Communiqué. Following the lead of a number of international organisations (notably the G20, APEC, OECD and IEA), the Friends have adopted framing and reframing strategies that have contributed to emerging expectations concerning the appropriateness of fossil fuel subsidies internationally and at the national level. The FFFSR have also engaged in strategic use of expertise and information to influence the behaviour of other actors, notably through contributions to the establishment of voluntary peer-review initiatives within APEC and the G20 – initiatives that appear set to expand in both organisations following successful pilots in 2015 and 2016, respectively.

Procedural advances at the international level can be fairly linked to the activities of the FFFSR. However, considerable work remains before any credible claim could be made for the maturing of an emergent norm for the disciplining of harmful fossil fuel subsidies (see also Chapter 5). A critical element of ongoing subsidy reform policy development is a clearer understanding of what is meant by ‘inefficient’, a central limiting criterion in almost all intergovernmental commitments to the rationalisation and phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies. Meaningful responses are also required – in particular, from the FFFSR – to legitimate concerns over the implicit and explicit prioritisation of the elimination of fossil fuel consumption subsidies in developing countries over the need to address and curb ongoing generous subsidisation of fossil fuel production within developed countries.

If accompanied by a process of open engagement, debate and interaction, the community of endorseees currently represented by an expanding list of logos on the FFFSR website might conceivably approach something akin to a broad-based transnational policy network, with enhanced measures of legitimacy, accountability and – ultimately – normative power.

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Interviews

- Interview 1 Vangelis Vitalis, former Ambassador to the European Union, New Zealand (13 December 2013).
- Interview 2 Ronald Steenblik, Senior Trade Policy Analyst, OECD (14 December 2013).