

Background and Introduction

Inspired by Christian ethics and human rights principles, members and partners of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA) and the ACT Alliance advocate for justice and dignity for all, and especially for the poorest and most marginalized who are typically overlooked in policy-making and implementation. Our international alliances represent tens of millions of Christians around the world who support smallholder farmers, whose production capacity is the foundation of food security in much of the developing world, but whose interests are routinely ignored in relevant policy and practice.

We acknowledge the decision taken at the 17th Conference of the Parties (COP 17) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to invite member countries and observers to submit their views on agriculture with regard to “cooperative sectoral approaches and sector specific actions, to enhance the implementation of Article 4, paragraph 1(c) of the Convention” for consideration by the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice (SBSTA). EAA and ACT Alliance recognize that including agriculture in the outcome of COP 17 is an important step towards addressing the impacts of climate change on agriculture and towards reducing the emissions of industrialized/large scale agriculture. We are however seriously concerned that including agriculture in cooperative sectoral approaches of the UNFCCC, aiming at reducing emissions from agriculture, could have severe impacts on small scale agriculture and jeopardize food security. Important environmental and social safeguards need to be put in place to avoid a mitigation policy in the sector of agriculture negatively impacting small scale agriculture and food security. Mitigation on agriculture should first and foremost be addressed by developed countries based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Based on our long experience working with farmers and agricultural communities around the world, and with our governments at national and international levels, we welcome the opportunity to submit the following critical points for consideration:

Our recommendations

- Agriculture must be considered and oriented according to the right to food.
- Decisions taken on agriculture within the UNFCCC must respect first and foremost the needs of smallholder farmers, and farmers’ organizations must play a central role in the design and implementation of any decisions that are taken on agriculture within the UNFCCC, and within the national programs to implement those policies, as with other processes affecting them.
- Increased investment is needed to assist smallholder farmers in adapting to the effects of climate change.
- Small-scale agriculture needs to be recognized as a viable solution towards community adaptation to climate change as well as mitigation. UNFCCC needs to strengthen all existing efforts, policy processes, like the Nairobi work program and the work program on loss and damage.
- Policy decisions taken within the UNFCCC need to take into account the findings of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report and the decisions taken within the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). We endorse the IAASTD report’s proposal for investments in ecological practices and science that encourages participatory knowledge creation and the integration of indigenous knowledge. Steps should be taken to ensure that agriculture delivers social and environmental benefits as well as economic returns.

Principles and Rationale for the Recommendations

1. Governments must meet their obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food

The right to food is a human right that protects the right of all human beings to live in dignity, free from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. The right to food is not about charity, but about ensuring that all people have the capacity to feed themselves in dignity. International human rights law requires that governments not take actions that result in increasing levels of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. It also requires governments to protect people from the actions of powerful entities or practices that might violate the right to food. States must also, to the maximum of available resources, invest in the eradication of hunger.

Despite the existence of these obligations in principle, people and communities continue to demand that governments respect, protect and fulfil the right to food in practice. Decisions on agriculture taken by governments within the UNFCCC framework must respond to those demands and Parties must ensure that neither actions nor the financial mechanisms to support those actions violate the right to food.

2. Protect subsistence agriculture

Smallholder farmers produce the majority of the world's food, much of it for local consumption. In order for them to adapt and to further build their adaptive capacity, they must be enabled to practice farming systems that are resilient to long term climate change and biodiversity and that strengthen the ecosystems of which they are a part. This form of agro-ecological smallholder farming and other forms of sustainable ecological and climate resilient food production should be promoted to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.

Early evidence gathered by the World Bank in Kenya suggests that the cultivation of large commercial crops have a much greater potential to soak up carbon than smallholder subsistence crops. As a result, there is a concern that a 'Climate Smart Agriculture' work programme would incentivize industrial-scale food production at the expense of smallholder farmers, traditional crops and biodiversity that have more potential to ensure food security and diverse crop production systems which, in turn, can be sustainable and resilient to climatic extremes and changes. Across Africa, governments are already leasing wide areas of land traditionally used by smallholder farmers to foreign companies for industrial agriculture or for planting trees as carbon sinks in order to gain carbon credits.

We are concerned that even if smaller farms are included in these projects, they will bear the direct risk of these potentially failing practices. While financial traders and carbon project developers will gain the bulk of the (potential) profits, the benefits to smallholder farmers will be meagre. For instance, the World Bank estimates that the Kenya Agricultural Carbon project, the Bank's first soil carbon sequestration project in Africa, will generate \$2.48 million in carbon revenues over the 20-year implementation period. Of that amount, the 60,000 farmers participating in the project would receive an average of \$22.83, or about \$1 per farmer per year.¹ Transactions costs for setting up this project are nearly half of the projected revenues. These costs benefit international consultants and project developers, rather than targeted communities. It is critical that scarce financial resources not be diverted to bolster unproven investment schemes, but rather go directly towards supporting smallholder farmers in their adaptation needs.

According to an October 2011 report of the Climate Policy Institute (CPI), less than four percent of the 2009-2010 average of USD 97 billion in annual climate finance flows went to adaptation projects. The

¹ Sharma, S. and Suppan, S., (Sept. 2011). *Elusive promises of the Kenya agricultural carbon project*. Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. Minneapolis.

private sector, despite its huge exposure to climate change risks, invested nothing in adaptation projects, according to CPI.

3. Engage and support smallholder farmers

The agriculture and climate change agenda is extremely complex. Yet still little is known about the feedback effects of a warming planet on soils, food production and food security, particularly in specific countries and regions. Not only does this climate change crisis require multi-disciplinary approaches but a truly democratic process to ensure that the most vulnerable are fully engaged in informing, knowledge-sharing and decision-making. The potential impacts of new measures must be fully understood and evaluated by all stakeholders. In the case of agriculture, it is the small food producers who most acutely experience the impact of climate variations and whose livelihoods and capacity to produce food are also affected by other policies and structural realities. These farmers have a wealth of appropriate technologies based on indigenous cultural identities, knowledge and experience which offers sustainable long-term solutions that can contribute to adaptation and resilience, as well as to the need to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture.

It is particularly important that farmers' organizations play a central role in the design and implementation of any decisions that are taken on agriculture within the UNFCCC, and within the regional and national programs to implement those policies. Parties must provide resources for promoting biodiverse and resilient agriculture, appropriate technology development, and diffusion and adoption of sustainable innovations.

4. Prioritise adaptation and resilience for developing countries

The UNFCCC's Nairobi Work Program (NWP) under the SBSTA has thus far not sufficiently been utilized to address agriculture. The NWP can ramp up its efforts to evaluate adaptation and vulnerability, matters of great and immediate concern to the rural poor. While mitigation is also critical in the agriculture sector, governments must prioritize differently based on their circumstances. In this regard, the UNFCCC needs to recommend strengthening all existing efforts, policy processes, like the NWP and the work program on loss and damage; while making an assessment of mitigation related efforts already under way² such as that being carried out by the Global Research Alliance on Agriculture Greenhouse Gases³.

Vulnerability to shocks and uncertainties is of great and immediate concern to the rural poor and directly impacts on food security. It is critical that any future work done within the UNFCCC framework on agriculture address this.

UNFCCC should recommend adequate financial commitment to adaptation through the UNFCCC, and its furtherance through all relevant policy processes including adaptation, technology, LULUCF, REDD+ and Flexible Mechanisms.

5. Recognize the responsibility of the industrialised food system

'Climate Smart Agriculture' is framed in such a way as to make smallholder farmers in the Global South responsible for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. However, it is the industrialized food system which is far more responsible for agriculture's runaway emissions – not small-scale farmers who would be saddled with the burden of a solution. Industrialised agriculture uses subsidised, intensive and ecologically destructive production methods, and often dumps products in developing countries. Insofar

² Buchner, B., Falconer, A., Hervé-Mignucci, M., Trabacchi, C., and Brinkman, B. (27 Oct., 2011). *The landscape of climate finance*. Climate Policy Initiative, Venice.

³ <http://www.globalresearchalliance.org/>

as ‘Climate Smart Agriculture’ aims at expanding carbon markets onto small farmers’ soil, it shifts the blame and responsibility for addressing climate change from rich countries onto the poor – the very people least responsible for causing the problem and most vulnerable to future uncertainties.

6. Address the difficulties in measuring carbon sequestration

Carbon offset strategies like the Clean Development Mechanism are, if at all, feasible only for industrial processes for which greenhouse gas emissions can easily be measured. Agricultural fields, however, are subject to complex biological processes and exhibit extensive heterogeneity. Impermanence and Leakage are critical problems in agriculture soil carbon that makes it an extremely unreliable carbon “asset” to measure and quantify, much less for generating credits.⁴ Fires, natural disasters, human activity and local conditions make it extremely difficult to quantify soil carbon in the long term. In addition, the trade-off between the build-up of organic matter for carbon sequestration and the increased risk of nitrous oxide release as a result of carbon-induced denitrification processes in soils is not thoroughly understood and therefore poses another major challenge to the quantification of carbon gain for any soil management system.

Science is in its early stages to understand the feedback loop climate change causes in soils. Additionally, because the majority of farmers work on fewer than two hectares of land, land tenure and the “aggregation” of thousands of farmers remains a critical concern in soil carbon offsets.

Conclusion

Agriculture is essential for ensuring food security and for the realization of the right to food for all. Action is needed, within and outside of the UNFCCC, to understand and address the threat of climate change to agriculture and food security. Appropriate adaptation measures in the agriculture sector must be supported. Mitigation of the greenhouse gas emissions from industrialized agriculture is an urgent necessity.

EAA and ACT Alliance together with our members and partners have been involved in the UNFCCC process for more than a decade and will continue to follow developments within this context with high interest to ensure that global food security and the protection of basic human rights, including the right to food, are respected in these decisions.

The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance is the most inclusive international advocacy organization of churches and Christian organizations, with members representing Catholic, Evangelical, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions. Our members are committed to speaking and acting together on issues of common concern, currently HIV and AIDS and Food. As an alliance of 80 churches and church-related organizations located around the world with members and constituents in the tens of millions, we are called by our faith to stand for justice, peace and a sustainable world. www.e-alliance.ch

ACT Alliance is a global humanitarian, development and advocacy network of 125 churches and related organisations united by a single vision: justice for the world’s poor. www.actalliance.org

⁴ See document: “Fiddling with Soil Carbon While Africa Burns”