

Submission to UNFCCC Secretariat on “Views on issues relating to agriculture under the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice”

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This submission is being made in response to the invitation of the UNFCCC Secretariat to the parties and Observer organizations to submit their views on agriculture, in compliance with the final outcome document of the work of the AWG-LCA and the official request for “the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice to consider issues related to agriculture at its thirty-sixth session”. It is believed that the further work of the SBSTA will be guided by the submission of the parties and observer organizations. With this submission we warn to develop any carbon market scheme with the aim of reducing emissions from agriculture.

Why agriculture - particularly small holder agriculture, and family farming should get greater attention in climate change negotiations

The farmers groups and organizations, and civil society organizations have been deeply dismayed by the current focus of negotiation on climate change and agriculture. It is believed that the trajectory of current debate does not take into consideration realities of small and marginal farmers in least developed countries and developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and instead aims at benefitting large farmers and big agri-business companies.

Globally, 1.7 billion farmers depend on agriculture, the proportion of which is substantially larger in developing and least developed countries. The increasingly erratic climate, its unpredictable variability & and extremes weather events are already having adverse impacts on agriculture & food security, which will increase - as it will increasingly alter the balance between food demand and production. South Asia and Africa are projected to be particularly vulnerable to these changes due to their large populations and great dependence on peasant farming type of agriculture for livelihoods. Majority of the developing countries and small island states are most likely to be affected by climate-change impacts. Even with a temperature rise of 1–2°C, the IPCC predicts serious effects, including reduced crop yields in tropical areas leading to increased risk of hunger, spread of climate-sensitive diseases such as malaria, water stress in Africa, increased risk of floods followed by drought and water scarcity for millions of people, inundation of coasts and threat of stronger tropical cyclones, complete submergence of some small island states and an increased risk of extinction of 20–30% of all plant and animal species. Already in India, significant areas of coastal agricultural land are impacted by salinity & loss of productivity.

With public spending of less than 4%, agriculture contributes one-third of developing countries GDP and provides employment to more than 60% of developing countries populations. The impact on agriculture is already having a profound impact on livelihoods, food production and access to food. Climate change impacts, increasing input costs and reducing farm incomes, sharply rising food prices and lack of public spending in agriculture is likely to make South Asia a net food importing region. The worst affected will be small and marginal farmers in least developed countries and developing countries. In India, more than 1,50,000 farmers have committed suicide in the last one and half decades as a result of rising input costs, falling productions and loss of incomes, lack of public investment and indebtedness. Climate change is already pushing majority of small farmers out of their fields & into uncertain futures. This also has a tremendous gender consequence, as men abandon non-viable farming and migrate to look for casual work, leaving vulnerable women & children to take care of homes & face societal pressure alone.

¹ Centre for Community Economics and Development Consultants Society, India is an observer organization to the UNFCCC.

² Public Advocacy Initiatives for Rights and Values In India (PAIRVI Associates), India is an observer organization for the UNFCCC

³ Beyond Copenhagen Coalition is a collective of 40 organizations and networks working on South Asia on climate justice and equity concerns

On the other hand, there is a growing body of literature (including IAASTD report) which says that small holders' farming is more efficient both in terms of production and resilience to climate change. Therefore, UNFCCC and climate change negotiations need to put small holder agriculture and family farming in the centre, address their concerns and improve their resilience, which could provide the best solution to the crises to climate change induced food crisis.

Text on agriculture agreed upon at Durban

D. Cooperative sectoral approaches and sector-specific actions, in order to enhance the implementation of Article 4, paragraph 1(c), of the Convention

General framework

68. Agrees to continue its consideration of a general framework for cooperative sectoral approaches and sector-specific actions with a view to adopting a decision on this matter at its eighteenth session, as appropriate;

Agriculture

69. Requests the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice [SBSTA] to consider issues related to agriculture at its thirty-sixth session, with the aim of exchanging views and the Conference of the Parties adopting a decision on this matter at its eighteenth session;

70. Invites Parties and accredited observer organizations to submit to the secretariat, by 5 March 2012, their views on the issues referred to in paragraph 69 above;

71. Requests the secretariat to compile submissions referred to in paragraph 70 above by Parties into a miscellaneous document for consideration by the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice at its thirty-sixth session.

Source: UNFCCC website

Current direction of negotiation on climate change and agriculture

The discourse on agriculture and climate change is completely dominated by the compulsion and debate on mitigation in climate change and so called climate smart agriculture. Driven mainly by countries having predominant agriculture export, it is fixated by the mitigation in agriculture. While mitigation of methane (CH₄) and Nitrous Oxide (N₂O) emission in agriculture (though this has been shown by scientific studies to be overblown) and livestock might be a good idea in developed and industrialized agriculture, it's almost irrelevant in developing countries with small scale farming systems. The current negotiation in agriculture fails to make a distinction between high input, high carbon footprint industrial agriculture in developed countries and low input, climate friendly sustainable agriculture in developing and least developed countries. In these countries the subsistence agriculture, is already climate smart using least energy, water and other resources. Even if not- like in the case of rice paddy – emissions are for survival and therefore not to be addressed under UNFCCC. What is critically needed in these countries is adaptation support for which fast track, transparent, reliable and accessible finance must be made available at the earliest.

The farmers, farmers groups and civil society organizations of the world fear that a work programme on agriculture by SBSTA will pave way for legitimizing and expedite the false solutions being offered. The current debate on agriculture and climate change which leans heavily in the favour of agri export countries and agri business companies will neither help agriculture and food production, nor will they contribute to mitigating climate change in any manner. The solutions that are being promoted to mitigate emission in agriculture will further ruin small and marginal farmers, increase hunger and food insecurity, and exacerbate emission and climate change in the long run.

The negotiations on agriculture in climate change promote linear agriculture, monoculture of genes, untested and hugely contested solutions to mitigate emission in agriculture like bio-char, agro-fuels, GMOs, no-till/conservation agriculture. At a time when the maximum diversity of genetic traits & climate-specific agri-practices will be needed to cope with the changing climatic conditions, this push for GM & single-type corporate agriculture 'solutions' will actually weaken our capacities to withstand the impacts. Assessing soil carbon and deploying methods to sequester carbon with the objective of luring farmers with carbon credits and market based finance, seems to be the only tangent of the negotiations. A growing body of both practitioners' and experts' research and literature, have been able to debunk these myths associated with the so-called climate smart agriculture.⁴ The current focus on soil carbon sequestration and using it for generating finances through private participation will definitely spell the doom for small and marginal farmers in least developed and developing countries. In countries like India, where majority of the farmers (more than 80%) possess a land holding smaller than 1 ha, the rush for sequestration will lead to them losing their lands and only productive asset. The situation remains similar in many South Asian countries with most of the farmers below poverty line and having least resilience and adaptive capacity. Some of the pilot projects on soil carbon sequestration under different voluntary carbon market schemes have run into problems ranging from technological handicaps, below par standards and financial inadequacy and unavailability. Farmers lured into these on false promises, have been hugely disappointed and disillusioned.

In the light of these realities and circumstances, UNFCCC must pursue a work programme, which protects the rights of small farmers and asks for centrality of concerns of small farmers in least developed and developing countries, is rooted in identifying adaptation needs of the farmers, and locating ways and means of providing financial support mainly through public sources. Agreed work programs and already started negotiation tracks on adaptation identify adaptation needs of the farmers, and locating ways of means of providing financial support mainly through public sources. There are a number ways in which current production and consumption subsidies in developed countries could be reorganized to facilitate this, besides other ways currently under consideration for generating finances for the Green Climate Fund.

Agriculture require scaled up financing

Substantially enhanced investments are required in agriculture to meet the projected demands and sustain food security in food deficit poor countries. The public investment in agriculture remains awfully low (less than 4%), which is gradually declining further. It is believed that more than US \$ 10 billion per annum investment will be required by the middle of the century, with maximum requirement in China and India, followed by Sub Saharan Africa and Latin America. Private investment has increased substantially within the last decade, however, much of it is focused on production of major raw crops including oilseeds & corn for agro-fuel production, wheat and feed grains for livestock. The trend shows a definite inclination towards forcing agricultural production to oil seeds, agro fuels and meat production. Low levels of public investment in agriculture have resulted in inadequate development in rural infrastructure, knowledge generation, and access to food and markets, which have kept the small farmers trapped in poverty.

Durban package declared availability of Green Climate finance of US\$ 30 billion from 2012 to be scaled up to US\$ 100 billion from 2020 onwards. There are significant uncertainties about from where the resources will be mobilized, and how it will be channelized. The apparent lack of money in agricultural finance has also provided an

⁴ MISEREOR, Germany has conducted research on Bio char and no till agriculture showing no substantial benefit either to the farmer or environment. These studies can be accessed at www.misereor.de

opportunity to advocates of market based mechanisms to ask for including agricultural mitigation in the CDM for look for new opportunities within market based mechanisms. However, as a matter of fact, even agricultural mitigation has awfully small money to offer to agriculture under the current financial instruments under UNFCCC and Kyoto protocol, GEF and GCF.

What small farmers want

Small farmers in least developed and developing countries feel that current focus on carbon sequestration and reliance on market based mechanism in fraught with serious consequences for agriculture and farmers. They feel

1. There should be a distinction in treatment of agriculture in developed industrialized countries and least developed and developing countries, who urgently need support for agricultural adaptation.
2. The current focus on soil carbon sequestration and agricultural emission from developing countries divert the focus from emissions from industrialized countries and undermines the importance of equity and Common but Differentiated Responsibility based on respective capabilities (CBDR). The proposed solution should be based on Human Rights Based Approach and sustainability of small holders and family farming.
3. Soil carbon and other agriculture offsets will not bring adequate, predictable, additional or reliable finance for adaptation or mitigation anywhere.
4. Carbon markets are an over-hyped, unreliable, volatile and inequitable source of funding. In spite of the vast volumes of money currently associated with carbon markets, only a tiny fraction of this goes to projects on the ground, that to, almost entirely to big corporate in developing countries.
5. The global price of carbon is already too low and volatile to deliver reliable finance to projects.
6. Given the technical challenges and scientific uncertainties about the actual sequestration of carbon in soil, this makes for a poor "tradable asset". Soil carbon offset credits are ineligible for the European Emissions Trading Scheme until at least 2020. It is also worth recalling that in negotiations preceding Kyoto Protocol, COP had actually rejected carbon credits through soil carbon sequestration.
7. Instead, these quasi-markets will require massive public funds for pre-financing, and serve mostly to generate profits for commodity speculators in the North.
8. Approval of a badly designed work program could pave the way for unproven and costly techno-managerial solutions and further concentration of agricultural and livestock gene pool with big agribusiness corporate.

Farmers in least developed and developing countries strongly believe that adaptation should have the first charge as far as agriculture and climate change in this region is concerned. They also strongly believe that much of the desired investment in agricultural adaptation will have to come from public finance. Private investment in agriculture will be motivated by controlling and monopolizing agriculture in developing countries at the hands of big agribusiness TNCs and it shall have to be tailored by national governments to suit the needs of agriculture and farmers. The international climate change negotiations are influencing national and sub-national policies and especially agricultural policies to follow the international prescription, which is highly dangerous. The UNFCCC negotiations must provide quick, appropriate, small farmer friendly, easily accessible, and reliable solutions to the adaptation needs for the farmers in least developed and developing countries who feed the world.

Concluded

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