Climate, Land, Ambition, and Rights Alliance (CLARA) – Talanoa Dialogue Submission

Introduction

CLARA – the 'Climate, Land, Ambition, and Rights Alliance' – is comprised of fifty+ civil society organizations and academic groups working to promote rights-based climate action in land-use sectors. We deeply appreciate Fiji's leadership calling for a 'Talanoa Dialogue', and we would like to ensure that the scope of the Talanoa Dialogue covers all elements of the Paris Agreement – ambitious mitigation, adaptation, and adequate finance and support to realize the mitigation and adaptation potential that the land sector can play in many countries. Slowly but surely, Parties and non-Parties are realizing the essential role that land-based actions must play in meeting the climate challenge, and in providing essential co-benefits to ensure that climate action occurs "on the basis of equity, and in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty", as required by the Paris Agreement. It is in that spirit – aligning deep emission reductions with broader poverty eradication and sustainable development goals – that CLARA respectfully makes this submission to the Talanoa Dialogue.

We believe there is significant opportunity for greatly increasing the adaptation and mitigation gains that can be achieved through changes in forestry and agricultural practices, given adequate support to carry these actions out when they occur in developing countries. An approach based on sustainable land-management practices, improvements in tenurial and resource rights for local communities and indigenous peoples, and restoration of forest, grassland, and coastal ecosystems can close a substantial portion of the current 'ambition gap' between current nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and the levels of effort required to reach 1.5°C pathways. Moreover, these approaches are not speculative; they are already proven to work at scale. Taken together, they encompass the different dimensions of 'ambition' – improving resilience, carbon sequestration/emission reductions, but also improving livelihoods and ecosystem integrity – implied by Article 4 of the Paris Agreement.

Achieving substantial mitigation from natural and working lands will only be successful with a greater acknowledgment of the rights- and equity-based dimensions of the climate challenge. Therefore, the Talanoa Dialogue needs to have a focus on the protection and achievement of human rights, and the need to scale up climate finance.

In the paragraphs that follow, CLARA addresses the three Talanoa Dialogue questions. We note current deficits in land-based carbon stocks compared to their potential; mention mitigation and adaptation opportunities associated with sustainable land management approaches; and briefly outline what some of those pathways will look like. Too little land-use sector ambition has yet been captured in Nationally Determined Contributions, thus CLARA's submission can be used as guide and inspiration for capturing more of that ambition in future NDCs.

Where are We?
Key Messages –

The world has already locked in a full degree C of warming. Inequality both within states and between states is at high levels. However, nation-states acting through the United Nations have articulated a shared set of 'Sustainable Development Goals'; and more broadly, Parties and non-state actors have articulated commitments pertaining to restoration and 'avoided deforestation' that provide additional frameworks for goal-setting in the land-use sector (see box). Total climate mitigation and adaptation potentials for agriculture are not yet as well-described. It is clear however that industrial food systems are a major driver of climate change, while small scale food providers in a web of decentralized food systems are feeding 70 percent of the world population with a very low carbon print.

States and non-state actors have already taken on important commitments pertaining to the land-use sector:

- New York Declaration on Forests (NYDF), intended to reduce natural forests loss by half in the next two years, and to end deforestation by 2030;
- Bonn Challenge, which targets restoration of 150M hectares of the world's degraded lands;
- Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15, to reverse land degradation and halt deforestation;
- Aichi Targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), that aim to preserve representative ecosystems while restoring ecosystem function, as well as strengthening the interconnections between intact and restored systems.

The world is already seeing irremediable impacts due to the current overall 'lock-in' of one degree C of warming: the loss of human development potential, negative impacts on livelihoods, and damage to ecosystem integrity caused by climate change and inappropriate land-use purposes and practices. Preventing further loss and damage requires taking seriously the 1.5 degree C limit: far deeper, permanent reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are required, based on the principle of equity. Achieving this requires greater ambition in all elements of NDCs – for mitigation, adaptation, financial support and capacity building.

That natural and working lands opportunity will only be successful if two other conditions are met: a greater acknowledgment of the rights- and equity-based dimensions of the climate challenge; plus deep and permanent reductions in fossil-fuel emissions to zero by mid-century. That is the only possibility for limiting warming to 1.5°C within the lifetimes of our children.

Where do we want to go? Key messages --

It is critical to meet the 1.5°C temperature target, by minimizing overshoot and (if necessary) returning to 1.5°C as rapidly as possible. Land-use actions such as: a) avoided emissions from deforestation and forest degradation; b) further avoided loss of any/all existing natural forest and wetland ecosystems; c) land restoration; d) promoting secure tenurial rights; and e) strengthening decentralized agroecological peasant food systems – are all mature 'technologies', available to Parties today for increasing NDC ambition. Working in tandem,

these three major solution sets – land rights, land protection, and agroecological approaches to food production – also improve social and ecosystem resilience in the face of climate change. The same cannot be said for more speculative technological approaches.

Humanity faces two decisions. The first decision is whether we as individuals and as nation-states can muster the collective will to define and pursue development and consumption pathways compatible with 1.5 degrees. This task alone will require an enormous commitment of energy and political will.

The second question – what types of societies will result from this enormous effort to achieve 1.5°C pathways – is of equal importance. The choice is stark. Committing to a set of proven approaches -- ending deforestation while improving resource tenure and collective rights to land; protecting ecosystem integrity in natural systems; restoring degraded grasslands, forests, and diverse cropping systems as well as supporting peasant food systems that today feed the majority of the world population – would bestow upon our descendants a planet biologically richer than is true today. Pathways leading to a restored future, with flourishing natural and working lands, requires upholding human rights and developing successful and scalable approaches to ecological restoration.

On the other hand—with reference to another 'paradigmatic pathway' -- it might be possible that the world could get to 2°C pathways utilizing unproven, technology-first approaches like Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS). But we are deeply afraid of a future for our children that is dominated by BECCS and other top-down-driven geoengineering approaches. For two reasons: there is immense moral hazard in pushing mitigation further into the future, if BECCS/geoengineering technologies fail to deliver on the needed scale of 'negative emissions'. Second, we are concerned that a commitment to large-scale carbon removal technologies risks reinforcing authoritarian state tendencies, trampling on individual human rights plus indigenous and collective rights, further impoverishing our food cultures, and hollowing out the provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity by damaging ecosystem integrity.

We are also concerned about how ambition related to agriculture is being defined. The research paradigm associated with increasing soil carbon levels, or increasing 'production efficiencies' in the livestock sector, is too narrow to get us where we want to go. Discussion about agriculture should be broadened to consider the food system as a whole, to support existing low carbon, ecological food systems based on diverse webs of small food providers, and also by focusing on the huge potential to reduce demand-side emissions.

The research agenda most likely to bring about deeper reductions in agriculture and food sector emissions is rooted in a) social sciences; b) analysis of emission levels associated with the different links in global commodity chains; c) reducing emissions from the consumption and

waste of luxury foodstuffs; and d) farmer-led agroecological research to improve productivity and crop-system resilience. Pursuing this research agenda best enables us to get 'where we want to go' by improving the productive capacity of natural and working lands through restoration, regeneration, reduced waste, and food-system re-localization. Some of this restoration will also come through 'land-sparing' efforts that lessens the human impact on the global land base through changes in diet and luxury consumption patterns.

One other area of 'luxury consumption' must be mentioned: air travel. Allowing this extremely carbon-intensive activity to expand under cover of "carbon neutral growth" by offsetting aviation emissions with avoided or sequestered emission from forests will undermine real mitigation efforts toward a 1.5°C pathway, and rights-based approaches to land and forest protection.

Contributing toward the 1.5C degree goal is a 'once-only' opportunity, for many reasons, but most crucial is the necessary temporal synergy between near-total elimination of fossil fuel emissions, retention of the carbon stores in existing intact landscapes, and enhanced ecosystem-based sequestration through restoration:

- ✓ Intact ecosystems do reach 'carbon saturation' points. The process can take a half-century or more, during which time there is significant net mitigation benefit.
- ✓ Preservation of existing, intact natural ecosystems is almost always a higher priority than restoration. Even when analyzed only from cost perspectives, 'avoided conversion' is usually cheaper than restoration, with better retention of co-benefits.
- ✓ The carbon sequestration opportunity diminishes globally over time: the longer we wait, the less productive it becomes, due largely to increased C losses from soils at higher temperatures. It is urgent that sequestration efforts through forests and other ecosystems be ramped up immediately, so as to secure more of the needed global mitigation response from 'natural climate solutions'.

How Do We Get There? Key messages –

The shared destination of 1.5°C clearly requires an understanding of the science and its equity implications; the immediate embrace of 'no-regrets', ecosystem- and food-system-based solutions; lifestyle changes necessary to keep within key planetary boundaries; and heightened national commitments. Whether and how we meet that climate challenge is largely determined by the scope and ambition of NDCs. Consequently one of the two most important tasks this year is completing a 'Paris Rulebook' that: encourages increased ambition from all countries, with developed countries taking the lead; makes per-sector contributions understandable; allows for comparability of effort; includes finance and other support within NDCs; and includes information on how the preambular elements of the Paris Agreement pertaining to inter alia *human rights, food security, gender justice, and ecosystem integrity are being addressed. The other important task is immediate implementation of 'natural climate solutions' pertaining to*

rights, protection and restoration of ecosystems, plus supply- and demand-side changes to agriculture production systems and diets.

CLARA's Talanoa Dialogue submission suggests a destination woven from scientific (see box), behavioral, and state-commitment strands. The immediate, vigorous pursuit of these pathways as defined by science is urgently necessary. Equally important is how social change must complement scientifically-defined forms of ambition. These include: an enhanced understanding of the requirement for convergence on lowered per-capita emissions; a willingness to fulfill stated obligations through the transfer of financial assistance for deeper adaptation and mitigation responses; profound changes in food culture (particularly diet) in high-income countries; plus encouragement of a land ethic based on local community and indigenous rights, and a broad valuation of ecosystem services and productive capacity.

Mitigation potential from natural pathways

Dooley and Kartha (2017) evaluate four land-based pathways and suggest that ~400 Gt CO_2 could be achieved over the century "without jeopardizing other critical land uses and sustainable development objectives."

Griscom et al (2017) find a "greater share of cost-constrained potential through reforestation, forestry, wetland protection, and trees in croplands than the IPCC AR5." The authors suggest achieving an annual net mitigation contribution as high as 23.8 Gt CO_2/year, using 2030 as the reference year.

Reporting and accounting for NDCs should include high levels of transparency. The Paris Agreement preamble notes the 'fundamental priority of safeguarding food security and ending hunger,' which explicitly echoes United Nation Sustainable Development Goal 2. Achieving Paris Agreement goals should be deliberately, programmatically integrated with all the Sustainable Development Goals, which is a consideration for both climate finance and the development of national policy frameworks. The vehicle for this integration can be the Enhanced Transparency Framework, which should allow parties to report on how the Paris Agreement's principles and obligations are being respected and promoted, and the observance of safeguards.

In terms of transparency, and based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, the accounting guidance for the Paris Rulebook should encourage separate, stand-alone quantification of emissions and removals from the land-use sector; promote longevity and resilience in land and forest carbon stocks; enable parties to understand and 'see' qualitative differences between natural and agricultural carbon stocks; and enable the UNFCCC and all Parties to track and differentiate progress relative to historical levels of emissions and removals. The scope of the Talanoa Dialogue should thus include assessment of: a) the levels of countries' commitments; b) how countries plan to achieve their commitments (including through the land sector); and c) provision of finance and support to achieve these goals.

In terms of the specific pathways leading to 1.5°C, CLARA members reviewed recently published literature pertaining to ambition in the land-use sector, and will continue to do so, in dialogue with findings from the IPCC 'Special Report' on the 1.5°C goal. Summarizing that literature is beyond the scope of this Dialogue submission, but the overall message is clear: moves toward improved sustainability and productivity of land-use, combined with restoration efforts and the enhancement of rights to land and resources, can provide a very significant portion of the overall mitigation effort needed to reduce climate forcing while improving resilience for vulnerability communities and ecosystems.

Conclusion

Collectively, we should have the wisdom to survive. The 'stark choice' posed above raises the question of whether we also have the *wisdom to thrive* – which will happen only if we also make room for and protect natural systems while honoring and assisting their ability to heal. It is our collective duty to effectively and equitably steward such systems for present and future generations.

We seek a world where human rights, the rights of indigenous peoples, peasants and local communities, food sovereignty, sustainable consumption, and the protection of biological diversity and ecosystem integrity are respected in the implementation of climate actions. These should be reflected in strengthened Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and supported with adequate provision of climate finance, in ways that are responsive to the needs of farm- and forest-dependent communities, as soon as possible.

None of the actions associated with moving toward this vision of the future for land use are novel, or untested. They are available now. They represent the most important step to be taken toward achieving mitigation in cooperation with the regenerative power of ecosystems, and the creativity of the human species.

CLARA Talanoa Dialogue Submission supported by:

GREENPEACE

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG

IFOAM ORGANICS INTERNATIONAL

INSTITUTE FOR AGRICULTURE AND TRADE POLICY

OXFAM

PACJA
PANAFRICAN CLIMATE JUSTICE ALLIANCE

PIVOT POINT

Regnskogfondet
RAINFOREST FOUNDATION NORWAY