



Agriculture in the climate change negotiations

At the 18th Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 18) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), for the first time the national delegations will have a say in the decisions taken on agriculture and climate change

As the specialized agency of the Inter-American System for agriculture, IICA collaborates with the institutions of its member countries, especially the ministries of agriculture, in the design of public policies, the elaboration and implementation of sectoral

strategies, and the provision of timely information. As part of those efforts, it has prepared this technical note as input for the delegations that will be taking part in the 18th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 18).



Recent progress on agricultural issues under the UNFCCC

Despite agriculture's importance for human development (food production, income generation, and social well-being are only three of the areas to which it contributes), the sector has been addressed only in a limited way in the global negotiations on climate change. At the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held in Durban, South Africa, in December 2011, space was created for the discussions on agriculture. Especially significant was the issue's inclusion in the remit of the Special Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action, which was asked to study the possibility of establishing a work program on agriculture.

In Durban, the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) was asked to consider agriculture-related issues, in order to exchange opinions on the subject with a view to the Conference of the Parties adopting a decision on the matter at COP 18. For the first time in the COP negotiations, 24 countries responded to that request and submitted to the SBSTA their opinions and arguments concerning the incorporation of agriculture into the climate change negotiations, and the establishment of a working group via which future agreements on agriculture and climate change could be strengthened.

Five countries in the Americas (Canada, the USA, Costa Rica, Bolivia, and Uruguay) submitted views on the subject, plus six from Asia (China, Iran, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh and Japan), and nine from Africa (Burundi, Gambia on behalf of the least developed countries, Malawi, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland on behalf of the Group of African States, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia). Denmark also made a submission on behalf of the members of the European Community, supported by Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey. Switzerland submitted a document on behalf of the Environmental Integrity Group, which includes Korea, Mexico, Liechtenstein, and Monaco; and Australia and New Zealand also made their views known.

A comparative analysis of 23 of the submissions, carried out by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD),¹ identified eight key points of convergence:

1. The work program should include adaptation and mitigation of climate change, and the synergy between the two (16 countries).
2. Recognition of the importance of food security (15 countries).
3. The need to enhance international cooperation and build on the work of the other groups, both inside and outside the UNFCCC (12 countries).
4. The importance of prioritizing adaptation to climate change (10 countries).
5. Financial support is a priority for the least developed countries, to enable them to promote adaptation actions (9 countries).
6. The importance of the links between agriculture, poverty reduction, and livelihoods (7 countries).
7. Recognition of the importance of small farmers (6 countries).
8. The importance of financing to mobilize investment in the sector (4 countries).

In the documents presented to support their arguments, most of the countries highlighted the links between agriculture, climate change, and food security. The role played by agriculture in poverty reduction and rural well-being was also underscored in most of the documents.

Another point of agreement is the need to address agriculture with an approach that takes into account both climate change adaptation and mitigation, and the relationship between the two. Although some countries place emphasis on one or the other, according to their particular circumstances, most believe that in agriculture there is an intrinsic relationship between adaptation and mitigation that makes it necessary to advance on both fronts simultaneously.

¹ IISD (International Institute for Sustainable Development). 2012. IISD Food Security and Climate Change Initiative. Agriculture and Climate Change: Post-Durban issues for negotiators. Available at: http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2012/agriculture_climate_change_durban.pdf.



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Why are the COP meetings important for agriculture?

The objective of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), approved in 1992, and any related legal instruments that the Conference of the Parties may adopt is “to achieve stabilization of greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. Such a level should be achieved within a time frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.”

This text shows that the basic purpose of the Convention is, therefore, to promote the global agreements and mechanisms, considering the vital role of agriculture and its importance in guaranteeing social well-being and food security.

The COP is the supreme body of the Convention, and tasked with keeping under regular review the implementation of the Convention and any related legal instruments that may be adopted. The COP meetings take the decisions necessary to promote the effective implementation of the Convention; hence, the importance of attending the annual general meetings and providing follow-up to the agreements reached.

The participation of representatives of agriculture and other critical sectors makes it possible to include measures aimed at mitigating GHG emissions in the formulation and implementation of national or regional programs, as well as those designed to facilitate adaptation to climate change.

Additional opportunities to address agriculture at COP 18

The submissions from the countries can be found on the UNFCCC’s Web page (<http://unfccc.int>). They will continue to be studied and discussed at the 37th session of the SBSTA, which will be taking place within the framework of COP 18.

For the first time, the delegations attending the COP will be able to take part in the decision-making process with regard to agriculture and climate change, make proposals and influence outcomes.

Agriculture has also been addressed by the UNFCCC under the Adaptation Framework, specifically as part of the following initiatives:

- The national adaptation plans
- The Nairobi Work Programme
- The Work Programme on Loss and Damage
- The Adaptation Committee

Adaptation has an impact on various sectors, including agriculture. The importance of adapting agricultural systems, to guarantee production and, thereby, food security, has already been addressed, but a common position has yet to be developed that would make it possible to reach concrete agreements or put forward proposals for action in the short and medium terms.

Another opportunity to include agriculture in COP 18 is provided by the REDD+ mechanism and a decision taken at COP 16, under which the Parties were asked to address the drivers of deforestation by means of an SBSTA work program, and report on their findings to COP 18.

Finally, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol has revisited the decision on land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF), making it possible to reactivate four work programs² that existed previously and whose objectives are to:

- Explore more comprehensive LULUCF accounting, including through land-based approaches;

² Stabinsky, D. 2012. Agriculture and climate change. State of play in the UNFCCC: Decisions from the Durban climate conference. Available at http://www.twinside.org.sg/title2/briefing_papers/No63.pdf.



- Consider, and possibly develop, modalities and procedures for additional LULUCF activities to be included in the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM);
- Consider, and possibly develop, alternative approaches to address the risk of non-permanence under the CDM; and,
- Develop and recommend modalities and procedures for applying the concept of additionality.

From whichever perspective COP 18 considers the inclusion of agriculture in the climate change negotiations, greater importance has to be attached to the issue, given the urgent need to ensure food security and sustainable production. This absolute priority calls for the solid commitment of the parties, both with respect to the reduction of GHG emissions, and the establishment of mechanisms to facilitate the adaptation of agriculture to climate change.

Aspects for the delegations to consider

Understanding the dynamics of the main bodies and negotiating groups is no simple task. Awareness of the process involved in the previous negotiations is essential. One of the first actions could be to identify countries with similar interests and objectives.

The principal negotiating groups, which do not all act as a bloc, include the G-77 plus China, the European Union, Economy in Transition, the Umbrella Group, the Alliance of Small Island States, the Least Developed Countries, the African Group, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC), the Environmental Integrity Group, and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).*

Other mechanisms have provided a more informal platform for communication; the Cartagena Group is a case in point.

Another key tool used to support the arguments in the negotiations are the assessment reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which make it possible to evaluate the state of scientific knowledge related to climate change and analyze the phenomenon's potential environmental and socioeconomic impact, to provide advice for the design of public policies. The Fourth Report, published in 2007, contains conclusive evidence of the causes and potential impact of human-induced climate change. The Fifth Report is expected to be published between September 2013 and October 2014.

* Source: UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2011. Guía de apoyo para el Negociador Iberoamericano de Cambio Climático.

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