

Agriculture at COP19: It is Time for Emerging Powers to Lead!

Diverging interests in climate talks have left potential agreements over climate change and agriculture at an impasse. While developed countries favor an approach centered on mitigation, developing countries strongly advocate for an adaptation-oriented approach that would provide them with enough support to preserve their agriculture in the face of climate change. While COP 19 may provide a window of opportunity for a positive move on adaptation, active support by emerging powers will be necessary to achieve meaningful results.

Climate change is expected to worsen the prospects for food security within the developing world in the foreseeable future. Increased frequency of droughts, flooding, and uncertain rainfall patterns are some of the impacts that will deter food production, distribution, and consumption in many countries. Taking the example of the East African Community (EAC); of the 130 million people that reside within this area, 4 out of 5 rely on agriculture for their living. Despite this phenomenon, a high rate of malnourishment still persists. Examples of this can be seen with Uganda (19% malnourished), Tanzania (44%), and Burundi (66%). It is in this sense that the implications of climate change for this region cannot be overstated.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was created in 1992 with the goal of stabilising Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions in the atmosphere. Under this convention, developed countries also provide financial and technological resources to developing countries to enable them in managing the shocks that will be incurred from climate change. In particular, agriculture in developing countries is projected to be significantly impacted by climate change.

Different countries that are party to the convention have had differing views on how to effectively support developing countries to sustain their agriculture. Solutions in the meetings of the Conference of Parties (COP) surrounding agriculture have primarily been centered on two separate approaches: adaptation and mitigation.

Adaptation: This entails a social response to environmental stresses and shocks: Illustrated examples of climate change adaptation in the agricultural sector include but are not limited to: (i) Improved irrigation infrastructure and weather forecasting; (ii) Diversification of crops/livestock/ and fishing varieties on farm; (iii) Off farm food storage.

← QUICK FACTS

» The most recent African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) on September 12th, 2012 affirmed adaptation as the main priority going into the 19th COP meeting.

» In its agenda note ahead of COP 19; Swaziland, speaking on behalf of the entire African continent stressed adaptation as the primary interest in addressing climate change.

» The preliminary agenda for COP 19 incorporates several segments about adaptation and agriculture.

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Mitigation: This primarily involves any sort of human intervention that is aimed at reducing sources of carbon emissions and increasing the sinks of greenhouse gas. Such actions include: (i) encouraging agroforestry and increasing the rate of reforestation; (ii) Employing the use of single high yielding seed varieties.

Under the COP discussions lies the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice which also undertakes studies and conducts reviews on different methodologies that can be employed in combating climate change. Examples of such studies are the Nairobi Work Program which is aimed at improving the understanding/assessment of the impacts, vulnerability, and adaptation to climate change. Further to this is the Cancun Adaptation Program which is also initiated with the intention of enhancing action on adaptation including international co-operation and coherent understanding of matter relating to adaptation under the convention.

Agriculture at an impasse

Diverging interests in the COP discussions have left potential agreements over climate change and agriculture at an impasse. Developed countries primarily favor an approach that is centered on mitigation whereas developing countries strongly advocate for an approach that is centered on adaptation. Different parties to the COP have thrown their weight behind the varying approaches in climate change and agriculture. Primary supporters of the mitigation approach are the USA, the European Union, Canada, and New Zealand. Proponents of an adaptation form are African countries, Brazil, China and India otherwise known as the BASIC group.

The most recent African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) on September 12th, 2012 affirmed adaptation as the main priority going into the 19th COP meeting. This position included a declaration that favors an 'Ecosystem Based Adaptation Program for Africa' and a call on developed countries to scale up support for the implementation of the relevant adaptation measures. These measures were through the Cancun Adaptation Framework and the Nairobi Work Program.

The declaration solidified this stance as it stated that agriculture was the 'backbone of the African economy' and therefore any response to climate change must be treated under the 'adaptation framework'. This was particularly because 'disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation share common root causes and goals, thus disaster risk management must serve as a tool for climate change adaptation'.

Within the East African Community, Uganda and Tanzania also threw their weight behind adaptation, with Tanzanian citing adaptation as a means of achieving 'food security' within the country. In its

agenda note ahead of COP 19; Swaziland, speaking on behalf of the entire continent also stressed adaptation as the primary interest in addressing climate change. It is worthy to note however, that in the agendas sent to the COP 19 meeting, most members did not dismiss mitigation. However, mitigation within these countries falls within the context of the National Appropriate Mitigation Action (NAMA) and other carbon reducing measures not specific to agriculture. Mitigation is important as carbon emissions need to be curbed, however within the context of agriculture adaptation receives greater priority.

BASIC, COP 19 and the Way Forward

The 14th BASIC Ministerial Meeting on Climate Change did support greater financing from developed countries to less developed countries. However there was a lack of an emphasis. Equal prominence was thrown to mitigation, as was to adaptation.

This lack of emphasis was rectified in the 15th BASIC Ministerial Meeting on Climate Change in article 15. Article 15 notes, "[The Ministers] indicated that commitments should not be limited to mitigation, but include adaptation as a matter of equal priority – as well as the provision of finance, technology development and transfer and capacity-building support for both." The 15th BASIC Ministerial Meeting acknowledges the need to prioritize mitigation and adaptation equally. However, articles 5, 8, and 9 acknowledge the lack of ambition towards mitigation and adaptation amongst the developed countries that is causing the burden of combating climate change to fall on the developing countries. Without commitment and ambition from the developed countries the effects of climate change will continue to multiply, and threaten food security within the developing countries.

Given the strong track record of the BASIC plus group at the COP meetings, the adaption approach to overcoming climate change challenges has garnered great support at COP 19. The UNFCCC has posted the agenda for COP 19, and support for adaptation activities are incorporated into many segments of the agenda. A stance of solidarity at the COP 19 meeting is vital for least developed and developing countries to realize their actual needs in view of their concerns coming from agriculture. Such solidarity should not only stem from African countries but should also include other countries and groupings that have previously supported developing countries.

USEFUL RESOURCES



AMCEN (2012). Arusha Declaration on Africa's post Rio+20 strategy for sustainable development

The final declaration of the 14th ordinary session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment. ► <http://bit.ly/1be8s4F>