



CUTS International and SAWTEE Event | UNCTAD XIII: Civil Society Forum

Climate Change, Food Security and Trade: Challenges and Opportunities

24 April 2012, Room G02, Qatar National Convention Centre

Report

CUTS International and SAWTEE jointly organized a side-event on “Climate change, trade and food security: Opportunities and challenges” during UNCTAD XIII on 24 April 2012. The major objective of the event was to discuss issues related to trade-climate change-food security linkages and to identify elements of holistic policy responses, in particular to inform the work of UNCTAD in these areas for the next four years.

Panelists of the session included Mark Halle, Director, Trade and Investment, and European Representative, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), Ambassador Nathan Irumba, Executive Director, SEATINI, and Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Dhaka, and Former Ambassador of Bangladesh to the WTO and UN Office in Geneva. Rashid S Kaukab, Associate Director CUTS International Geneva moderated the session.

The speakers and participants unanimously agreed that the issue of trade, climate change and food security should be looked at holistically and commended the organizers for initiating work in this respect.

Mr Irumba said that the consequences of climate change have already started to be felt in Africa, which in turn has been affecting food security due to its direct impact on agriculture. Rising population without concomitant increase in agriculture productivity has led to stress on land as a result of which land degradation has been taking place at a faster pace. This is one of the internal contributing factors to climate change. Hence, there is need to provide African countries with new technologies and scientific knowledge so that they would be able to increase their agriculture productivity and hence minimize the stress on land.

Mr Halle stressed on the need to provide developing countries the policy space to maintain a fine balance between trade, climate change and food security. He also stated that transfer of technology from developed to developing countries is essential. Further, he deplored the use of trade measures, e.g., the use of border tax, as an instrument by developed countries on imports of countries that do not meet environmental standards, which are mainly developing countries. He raised the issue of “land grabbing” as a good example of the interface between trade, climate change and food security.

Dr Bhattacharya suggested that problems related to the linkage between trade, climate change and food security could be better resolved through a sectoral approach. Also, the approaches to look at the linkages should be varied, such as agro-ecological, policy-induced, etc. Referring to export bans of agriculture and food commodities during the food crisis of 2008, he said that resorting to such measures could be detrimental in the face of climate change and its impacts. He pointed out that UNCTAD has taken food security as the second biggest challenge facing the world today and has called for the need to resort to sustainable agriculture and linking farmers with the market. Thus, although implicitly, UNCTAD has raised the issue of the linkage between trade, climate change and food security but there is need to engage in more analytical work in this area, which it can perform in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and civil society organizations.

Rashid S Kaukab concluded the event by providing a summary of the discussion which had covered three inter-related themes: one, the need for clear conceptual and analytical guidelines to undertake research on climate change-trade-food security linkages; two, finding ways to deal with practical/operational issues on the ground, e.g. through case studies of “landgrab”; and, three, addressing policy/governance gaps and weaknesses at the national, regional and international levels to ensure comprehensive and holistic responses.