

CCD and C2A Note



GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR CLIMATE-SMART AGRICULTURE: A FOOL'S BARGAIN ?

Promoted by the FAO since 2009, the idea of Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) is now entering a new phase, in which a dedicated Global Alliance is to be launched at the Climate Summit organized by the Secretary General of the United Nations in New York on September 23, 2014. Several other international actors, such as the World Bank, and certain countries such as the United States and

the Netherlands, are committed to this approach; some major companies also openly expressed their support for this during an international preparatory meeting that was held in The Hague in July 2014. In the same time, organizations from international civil society are raising their concerns regarding this approach and several countries have decided as for now not to take position.

Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA): TOO VAGUE

Since 2009, the FAO has defined Climate-Smart Agriculture as agriculture that “sustainably increases productivity, resilience (adaptation), reduces/removes GHGs (mitigation), and enhances achievement of national food security and development goals”. It should be noted that the way in which these three pillars relate to one another remains vague. Thus, we may wonder whether any agricultural practice that meets one of them could be characterized as CSA compliant. Our organizations believe that this concept raises three major difficulties from the outset:

- **a “blinkered” concept:**

CSA obscures the existence of different agricultural models, along with the different impacts they have, both from the point of view of the environment and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, as well as that of food and nutritional security¹. It also conceals the distinct challenges that those different agricultural models face in terms of fighting climate change. Priority must thus be given to adaptation by smallholder family farming

to the effects of climate change, which has a strong impact on that farming. As for the mitigation measures foreseen for the agricultural sector, these should aim to reduce emissions where they are the strongest; i.e., in large-scale industrial farming (widespread use of external inputs and large responsibility in reducing forest canopy).

- **a (too) all-encompassing concept:**

The concept covers practices that are widely contested, such as the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs); the “climate pretext” is now used more and more often by actors in the sector to justify their use. The concept is also being used to justify the “sustainable” agricultural intensification supported by the major actors in the agribusiness sector and by large-scale producers

who promote the widespread use of pesticides and chemical inputs (which does not make sense from a climate perspective). Their arguments are based on a supposedly direct relationship between increasing agricultural production and food and nutritional security, although that link has been refuted.

¹ For information about the virtues and advantages of smallholder family farming, see [C2A note 17](#) (April 2014), published for the International Year of Family Farming.

• a counterattack to agroecology?

The idea of agroecology hardly makes an appearance in the 570-page FAO reference document on CSA (*Climate-Smart Agriculture Sourcebook*, FAO, 2013), despite the fact that agroecology has proven its worth. Widely supported by civil society organisations, recognised in the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development, and promoted by the French government, agroecology proposes a new model: rely on traditional practices and knowledge, bet

on the potential of ecosystems and of natural biomass cycles, and be locally based and with a very strong attachment to the land. Agroecology is also promoting a more global approach on food systems. In recent years, it has thus shaken up the dominant model of agricultural development, based on intensification, export crops, and the use of biotechnologies and petrochemicals. The rise of CSA might therefore be seen as a counterattack against agroecology.

Finally, the current concept of CSA does not help establish policy guidelines or prioritize research and investment programs in favor of environmentally and socially friendly farming. The CSA approach is therefore at risk of not supporting the priority objective of strengthening the productive web of smallholder farmers, characterized by their resilience and diversity, who are the only ones able to truly improve food security and to meet the climate challenge. It should also be noted that the big private-sector actors in agroindustry have already claimed ownership over CSA, seeing it as a way to promote themselves and to develop new markets (for instance, for GMOs) and revenue streams (by promoting the potential for carbon capture and storage of the cash crops in which they specialize, for example). In this framework, the idea of CSA might become nothing more than "business as usual", without any ability to actually influence or change these practices.

The Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture (ACSA): WHAT ARE ITS OBJECTIVES AND HOW IS IT GOVERNED?

The ACSA would be a political body based on three pillars: information sharing and strengthening knowledge, mobilisation of public and private financing, and creation of a favorable political environment. Mere days before it is to be launched, however, our organizations still have serious questions about what its objectives are and how exactly it will be governed, given that there are no statutes clearly establishing the rules.

• A new forum to influence the agriculture/climate issue?

Our organizations fear that the ACSA will bypass the legitimate and inclusive governance forums that have been recognized by the international community and that have been working on this issue for many years. Specifically, the risk is that the ACSA would serve as competition to the multilateral climate negotiations that are to take place in Lima in December 2014 (COP20) and in Paris in 2015 (COP21). In the co-Presidents' report on the 3rd Global Conference on Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Security and Climate Change (December 2013), which was dedicated to the elaboration of the ACSA, the UNFCCC was mentioned only as a stumbling block; however, as underlined by the Interministerial Food Security Group (GISA), it is under the UNFCCC "that coherent climate strategies must be defined, taking into account the issues of agriculture and food security"². And the fact that the international community has found it difficult to integrate agriculture into the discussions undertaken under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) should in no way justify creating a parallel and less inclusive process. Admittedly, under pressure

of civil society and some countries, the rhetoric has evolved and ACSA Framework Document should *in fine* include a paragraph recognizing the role of UNFCCC as the primary international forum on climate change and affirming the wish not to prejudice its work. But what significance beyond this formal recognition, in terms of articulation and consistency between those forums? In that regard, it should be noted that the supporters of the ACSA, such as the United States and the World Bank, are known for having taken very controversial stances on the agriculture/climate issue within the framework of the UNFCCC, in particular in favor of including the agricultural sector in the carbon markets, despite the limits and risks imposed by such an approach. Under the pretext of creating an action-oriented forum, is the issue here really that of exercising political pressure on topics on which opinions diverge at the UNFCCC? In the same vein, it should also be noted that the initial texts creating the Alliance make only very light mention of the Committee on World Food Security.

² See GISA's position: « [Agriculture, climate change and food and nutrition security: towards a coherent approach in favour of developing countries](#) ».

• Big companies and private investors at the heart of the ACSA?

The Alliance intends to promote “climate-smart” agricultural investments and may become a forum used for labelling. We know that some agricultural investments can have negative impacts on the rights, the environment, and the food and nutritional security of local populations. The fact that CSA is so vague, however, means that their exclusion cannot be guaranteed. An alliance such as the ACSA ought to set an example and guarantee that the investments it supports do not cause harm to the local populations and, in particular, do not further land grabbing and monopolizing of natural resources – all the more so given that it is supported by the United Nations and by individual States. ACSA stakeholders should explicitly commit to implementing the highest international human rights standards, which include the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land. A mechanism for monitoring impacts

and for appeals should also be foreseen in advance. Another issue is that the ACSA treats the private sector as a single gigantic system, with no distinction made between smallholder farmers, local SMEs/SMIs, and big multinational agroindustrial firms, although it is support to local private initiatives that most benefits the people. This deficiency allows the biggest enterprises that promote the use of chemical inputs and industrial farming to feel at ease in the Alliance. In one of its recent reports, Yara associates CSA with sustainable intensification and states that it “fulfills the three aspects of climate-smart agriculture (...) by offering products and solutions and by developing and sharing knowledge”³. Chemical fertilisers represent 6% of total CO2 emissions; why is one of the biggest companies in that field jumping in to support CSA with such brio and participating in the preparatory meetings of this Alliance? Does it perhaps see this as a way of labelling its chemical fertilizers as “climate-smart”?

• No clear rules, roles or responsibilities for actors

Contrary to claims made by ACSA promoters, our organizations feel that mechanisms to hold the various stakeholders responsible and the monitoring and assessment processes must be clearly defined before the launch of the Alliance. Experience with the G8's New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition has demonstrated

that any evolution “from the inside-out” is in fact unlikely to occur (see box). Nor will the Alliance be able to avoid the power asymmetries that exist elsewhere. Agribusiness interests and those of the richer governments will therefore probably carry greater influence than those of smallholder farmers and developing countries.

• The role of civil society

Civil society from both the North and the South has once again been marginalized in the discussions concerning the ACSA. Although civil society representatives were able to participate in various international meetings, including the last preparatory meeting (held in The Hague from 9 to 11 July), taking into account the knowledge and points of view of those civil society actors, in particular from social movements and smallholder organisations, was never an objective in and of itself. As the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has stated, however, “the participation of (...) groups in the policies that affect them should become a crucial element of all food security policies, from policy design to the assessment of results. (...) Indeed, improving the situation of

millions of food-insecure peasants cannot be done without them”⁴.

Civil society is becoming organized at international level to ensure its voice is heard, as attested to by the Open Letter signed by around one hundred organisations and published in July 2014⁵. Although a certain number of questions were raised at the preparatory meeting in July and certain issues raised by signatory organizations were reflected in the documents preparing the ACSA (agroecology, the right to food, international forums and texts, recognition of the diversity of agricultural models), civil society organizations fear that these few advances are not enough to change the current state of affairs or to truly engage Alliance stakeholders.

DÉJÀ VU ?

This Alliance brings to mind another one, launched in 2012: the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition. At the initiative of G8 members, the aim of the New Alliance is to “unlock the power of the private sector” to fight food insecurity by facilitating investments by multinationals. In return, the ten African target States are expected to undergo legislative reforms intended to improve the business climate and access to resources. In addition to criticizing the promoted agricultural model, civil society organisations from both the North and the South challenge how the New Alliance operates: there are no

governing or monitoring bodies with clear roles and responsibilities, nor is there any emphasis placed on participatory and qualitative accountability.

From the start France has stated that it does not agree with certain positions advocated by the New Alliance. It therefore decided to support only family and peasant farming and to work from the inside to guide the New Alliance toward a type of governance and an agricultural model that are more in line with its position. Two years later, however, that strategy has proven ineffective⁶: France finds itself to be one of the countries most involved (both politically and financially) in an initiative of which it disapproves. Is it ready to take the same risk with the ACSA?

³ See Yara's report, *Impact*, published in March 2014.

⁴ A/HRC/16/49, p.18.

⁵ <http://climateagricultureconcerns.weebly.com/>

⁶ ACF/CCFD/Oxfam report, *Hunger*: just another business, September 2014.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF COORDINATION SUD

France should not become involved in this Alliance, the objectives and governance of which remain unclear, and which seems to endorse a model of industrial farming and to open the door to over-simplistic solutions to climate and food challenges. In addition, those solutions are not consistent with those defended by France in recent years. At the very least, it is essential that no precipitous decision be taken at Ban Ki-Moon's Climate Summit, in order to give time to analyze the initial steps taken by this Alliance, both in terms of its orientation and its operation.

Besides, for the States and organizations that would decide to join the Alliance, that will *de facto* be launched during upcoming New York Climate Summit, great caution is needed as regards the following necessary prerequisites upon which its launch ought to be conditional and that are however not met as for now.

- **The relationship with the UNFCCC and the Committee on World Food Security.** The risk is that of creating a political forum that would compete with the on-going negotiations under the UNFCCC and represent the opinion of certain actors, or that the ACSA would emerge as an "advisor", broadly orienting international policies and legislation, and/or that it would side-step recommendations by legitimate, inclusive and participatory forums of governance, such as the Committee on World Food Security. France, as the future chair of COP21, should give every opportunity to the multilateral UN process.
- **The establishment of a "human rights" pillar and of inclusion and exclusion criteria.** For any such initiative it is essential to guarantee the implementation of the highest international standards in terms of human rights, environment, land governance and investments, etc. In addition, farming practices that are harmful to food security and the environment (GMOs, industrial biofuels, etc.) should be explicitly excluded.
- **Consistency between the choice of agricultural model and food and nutrition security and climate change objectives.** In this respect, the development of agroecology and family and smallholder farming ought to be explicitly prioritized (thus implying the mobilisation of public financing); so, too, should the development of private local initiatives rather than support for big multinational groups and/or their local subsidiaries.
- **A framework of governance that is understandable and transparent and the requirement of clear responsibility and accountability rules for all stakeholders.** Without this, the ACSA runs a strong risk of turning into nothing but a forum in which approaches already undertaken elsewhere simply collect, without necessarily responding to the issue of the right to food and to the need to rethink our patterns of production, trading and consumption in the face of the dual climate and food challenge. The ACSA's relevance will depend in particular on its ability to take the viewpoints of small-scale farmers and civil society organizations seriously: our organizations now await proof of that ability.

Coordination SUD is the French national platform of international solidarity NGOs. Founded in 1994, it brings together more than 140 NGOs active in the fields of humanitarian aid, development assistance, environmental protection, the defense of disadvantaged people's human rights and international solidarity education and advocacy.

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The Climate and Development Commission (CCD) of **Coordination SUD** works to influence the strategies of the development actors, to pass on good practices and to influence international negotiations. It brings together about 20 international solidarity NGOs.

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The Agriculture and Food Commission (C2A) of **Coordination SUD** brings together about 20 international solidarity NGOs working to realize the right to food and increase support for smallholder farming in policies that impact world food security.

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