

Don't be fooled!

Civil society says NO to “Climate Smart Agriculture” and urges decision-makers to support agroecology

We the undersigned belong to civil society organizations including social movements, peasants/farmers organizations and faith-based organizations from around the world. We are working to tackle the impacts of climate change that are already disrupting farming and food systems and threatening the food and nutrition security of millions of individuals. As we move towards COP21 in Paris, we welcome a growing recognition of the urgent need to adapt food systems to a changing climate, and the key role of agroecology within a food and seed sovereignty framework in achieving this, while contributing to mitigation through the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

However, despite these promising signals, we share deep concerns about the growing influence and agenda of so-called “Climate-Smart Agriculture” (CSA) and the Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture (GACSA). Climate change is the biggest and the most urgent threat our societies face. We need a radical transformation of our food systems away from an industrial model and its false solutions, and toward food sovereignty, local food systems, and integral agrarian reform. We therefore urge decision-makers at country and UN levels to reject the dangerous rhetoric of Climate-Smart Agriculture.

Climate Smart Agriculture must not be confused with agroecology¹. Agroecology is a holistic approach to agriculture, based on principles of ecology as well as food and nutrition security, food sovereignty and food justice which seek to enhance agricultural systems by using and recycling natural resources instead of relying on externally-purchased inputs. It encourages local/national food production by small food producers and family farmers, and is based on techniques that are not delivered from the top-down, but developed from farmers’ traditional knowledge and practices as well as from farmer innovations. This approach is based on farmers’ participation and makes nature a powerful ally in ensuring food and nutrition security, building healthy soils and conserving water. It increases farmers’ incomes and resilience in the face of climate change, while improving biodiversity and crop diversity. Governments must recognise that industrial approaches that degrade soil health and water retention, pollute water systems, poison nature and create dependency on external inputs, impoverish biodiversity and ecosystems are not only harmful and unnecessary, but also deeply misguided for a planet facing hunger, ecological crises and climate change.

“Climate-Smart Agriculture” may sound promising, but it is a politically-motivated term. The approach does not involve any criteria to define what can or cannot be called “Climate Smart”. Agribusiness corporations that promote synthetic fertilisers, industrial meat production and large-scale industrial agriculture – all of which are widely recognised as contributing to climate change and undermining the resilience of farming systems – can and do call themselves “Climate Smart”. CSA claims to include all models of agriculture. However it lacks any social or environmental safeguards and fails to prioritize farmers’ voices, knowledge and rights as key to facing and mitigating our climate challenges. It therefore actually threatens to undermine agroecological approaches as defined by practitioners², while endangering the future development and upscaling of such approaches.

The Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture was launched one year ago and is now putting a lot of energy into its outreach campaign, while its Action Groups have started working on their own objectives. As of 20th July, its membership of 21 nations comprised of only ten developing countries and three farmers’ organisations - in contrast with a wide corporate membership. While some organisations from civil society and rural social movements rejected the GACSA from the beginning, others have made repeated efforts to engage with it^{3,4} to reduce the threat of greenwashing and false solutions. In spite of these efforts, the concerns expressed were largely ignored, as recently recognised in a paper issued by the Institut du Développement Durable et des Relations Internationales (IDDRI)⁵. Instead, some of agriculture’s least environmentally sensitive actors were welcomed into the alliance: 60% of the

¹ See the *Declaration of the international forum for agroecology*. Nyéléni, Mali 27 February 2015

² Ibidem

³ Letter 1 <http://www.climatesmartagconcerns.info/open-letter.html>

⁴ Letter 2 <http://www.climatesmartagconcerns.info/rejection-letter.html>

⁵ IDDRI, “Ensuring transparency and accountability of the Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture in the perspective of COP21”, July 2015

private sector membership of the alliance is related to the fertilizer industry⁶. In addition, transnational corporations that have questionable social and environmental impacts, such as Monsanto, Walmart and McDonalds have launched their own “climate-smart agriculture” programs⁷.

As the UN picks up the pace for action on climate towards COP21 and beyond, we call on countries to recognise that the Climate-Smart Agriculture path can take us in the wrong direction, falling short of ensuring food and nutrition security, and undermining the radical transformation of current food and agricultural systems that the world urgently needs. Without definitions, criteria, standards, safeguards or exclusions, “Climate Smart Agriculture” is a meaningless and dangerous concept that has no place as a climate strategy. Moreover, the GACSA is not answerable or accountable to any UN structure involved in food security, climate or agriculture.

With new instruments for international climate finance being put in place to spend many billions of dollars, there is a real risk that wealthier countries – in their aim to meet their financial commitments⁸ – may end up funding projects and programmes that direct resource towards false solutions in countries where they have vested interests. Thus:

- As the Green Climate Fund programme of work gets underway, we welcome the importance given to adaptation. Agriculture will be a principal component of this programme. However, we urge the GCF Board not to accredit any programme of work or institution that is based on Climate Smart Agriculture. Instead, we strongly encourage them to support community-based solutions emerging from frontline communities, such as agroecology.
- An “Agenda of Solutions”⁹ is being created for COP21 which aims to demonstrate the commitment of non-state actors to reaching a new and ambitious legal agreement in 2015, and which could be included or referred to in the outcome document of COP 21 along with the negotiated agreement. We urge governments not to endorse Climate Smart Agriculture as a solution to climate change, nor to label any other initiative that would be part of the “agenda of solutions” as part of the concept.

We face a critical moment. Real solutions to climate change must be agreed upon and urgently adopted. We urge decision-makers to stand against green-washed false solutions rebranded as CSA, and to have the courage to recognise and promote the decisive role of agroecology in ensuring food and nutrition security and food sovereignty in the face of climate change, resource scarcity, and growing demand challenges. The international and regional processes that emanated from the FAOs Symposium on Agroecology in September 2014 as well as the upcoming Committee on World Food Security High Level Panel of Experts report on “Sustainable agricultural development” and the recent Nyéléni Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology, present a unique opportunity for agroecology to be endorsed as the mainstream pillar of agricultural policy frameworks worldwide. Moreover, communities, civil society organizations, organised social movements, peasants and faith-based organizations are developing, strengthening, and supporting alternatives at local and national level that have proven to be successful in the global fight against climate change. We call on decision makers to acknowledge this broad range of tangible and concrete actions, to listen, support and accompany them, while not succumbing to global top-down initiatives that rely on models from the past.

We therefore call upon decision makers to endorse the application of agroecology internationally within the UN processes relating to climate change and agriculture, as well as at national level.

⁶ Either through the direct membership of companies from the fertilizer industry (Haifa Chemicals Ltd., Yara and the Mosaic Company) and/or through their various umbrellas (such as Fertilizers Europe, The Fertilizer Institute, The international Fertilizer Industry association, ...) in CIDSE, “Climate-Smart revolution... or a new era of green-washing?”, briefing, May 2015

⁷ Monsanto: <http://discover.monsanto.com/posts/approaching-climate-smart-agriculture-perspective-systems/>; Walmart : <http://news.walmart.com/news-archive/2014/10/06/walmart-announces-new-commitment-to-a-sustainable-food-system-at-global-milestone-meeting>; McDonalds: <http://news.mcdonalds.com/Corporate/manual-releases/2014/McDonald's-CEO-to-Speak-at-United-Nations-Climate>

⁸ Agreed in Copenhagen in 2009 under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

⁹ <http://climateaction.unfccc.int/> At the moment is unclear whether the Action Agenda will enter the negotiating text, and therefore get “institutionalized” also beyond Paris.

First signatories:

1	Brot für die Welt	Germany
2	Entraide & Fraternité	Belgium
3	Find Your Feet	UK
4	Biofuelwatch	UK/USA
5	Action Aid International	International
6	Corporate Europe Observatory	International
7	Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP)	USA
8	EcoNexus	UK