

Deliberations at the CoP18, Qatar, Doha

Mainstreaming agriculture as an integrated climate change mitigation and adaptation option: An organic agriculture perspective

Side event jointly organized by the National Council for Climate Change, Sustainable Development and Public Leadership (NCCSD), Ahmedabad, India, and the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), Germany, 06 December 2012

Backdrop

1. Significant discussions on the sustainability of organic farming practices have been in progress world over. The feasibility of the organic farming as a climate friendly tool has also been in the centre stage of deliberations; especially in the context of enrichment of soils with organic substances and temporal implications of sustained economic returns. These aspects also have a significant bearing on the choice and mix of organic agriculture practices in turn determine productivity and livelihood aspects of communities that practice organic agriculture.
2. The scale of operations is equally important for small holders. This is particularly relevant for developing countries context.
3. While the importance of climate resilient agriculture and related practices appears to be growing even with reference to recruiting larger tracts of land including waste land, the possibility of focus shifting from small scale operations to large scale agriculture production system appears to loom large (<http://ccaafs.cgiar.org/taxonomy/term/659>).
4. Cooper et al – 2012 (<http://cgspace.cgiar.org/handle/10568/24863>) present an excellent collection of several large scale implementation initiatives deriving mitigation and adaptation benefits in the agriculture and food sector. These examples corroborate the above stated and call for a reality check on the dynamics of scale, tradeoffs, sustainability and local level feasibility. Discussions on pro-poor climate change mitigation are also an integral aspect of these deliberations.
5. The Institute for Development Studies (<http://www.ids.ac.uk/news/time-for-a-rethink-getting-smart-about-policy-on-climate-change-and-agriculture>) highlighted the fact that the decision on a work programme on agriculture has been deferred yet again at the CoP18. This is notwithstanding the growing recognition mentioning about the positive impacts of agriculture on resilience in addition to carbon storage and related developmental benefits. In this context it is very important to safeguard the interest of small holders in particular and prevent overemphasis on large scale farming. It is equally important to ensure benefits for small holders especially because of the inclement economic environment in the developing world. This in turn could determine security and peace at the local level and the overall quality of life of the farming community in particular.
6. Considering the aspects indicated above, it is critical to build capacities of communities in a timely manner on such aspects as integrated soil health, biodiversity management including crops and related vegetation, signals of stress faced by crops and related vegetation in addition to pests, predators and parasites, aligned with locally relevant

developmental considerations. Public leadership and capacity building to articulate challenges at the micro level and planning to overcome such challenges are equally important for holistic and sustainable impact of management.

The Technical framework for the side event

NCCSD and IFOAM took note the above stated and recognized the need to deliberate on five major aspects and about fifteen cross cutting teams. These are indicated in PPT1.

- These pertain to the physical, chemical and biological aspects of production, agricultural tools and techniques, a special focus on carbon and eco-system rewards for communities, the need for resilience augments as people centered initiatives and the urgent need for convergence across policies, plans, programmes and projects.
- IFOAM emphasized the need for “progressing beyond speculation” with special reference to such long term benefits as carbon store in soils and sustained productivity.
- NCCSD called for a complementing focus on community centered livelihood strengthening through climate resilient organic farming.
- Eight speakers (as indicated in PPT1) deliberated on these aspects.

Justice B P Singh highlighted three cross cutting aspects including the need to ensure a strong relationship between economic security, agricultural productivity and livelihood security through a framework of equity and justice which in turn would enable the architecture of institutional and financial mechanisms. Communities have to be assisted with easy access to alternatives through well defined enabling mechanisms and that it is important to also ensure their focused participation in training and capacity building programmes for sustainable climate friendly agriculture (DOC1).

Dr. Kirit Shelat, NCCSD, emphasized on the need for micro planning tools and techniques (PPT2) that will twin climate resilient production systems and established well informed communities that can exert their influence for nutrition, economic and livelihood security in addition to the performance of soil systems. Climate change impacts could logically be expected to strike most on soils and related physico-chemical-biological process and, therefore, the call for a systematic and detailed analysis of soil health followed by prescriptions for appropriate crop mixes based on soil health.

Andre Leu of the IFOAM laid a special emphasis on social equity vis-a-vis organic agriculture with implications of sustainability for small farmers in particular. He presented an overview of the concept of organic agriculture and the food requirement challenges across the globe. He cited reports of the UNCTAD and UNEP in strengthening his call for action on organic agriculture, substantiating it with information on the positive impacts of using compost in five different cropping systems (PPT3).

Sue Edwards et al (PPT4) of the IFOAM presented interesting cases pertaining to land restoration and livelihoods in Ethiopia (Tigray Project). Some of the unique aspects included community governance through by-laws on natural resources management to restore control over land and livelihoods, including their right to say and use their own seed; improved crop production system and applications of biochemical principles of insects-plant interactions. The case of restoring a micro-catchment landscape in six years was also presented, alongwith strategically important information on increase on yield because of compost use.

Dr. Sanjay Deshmukh highlighted the importance of mangroves and bamboo as additional eco-system / livelihood security means that confer mitigation advantages on clear and tangible terms (PPT5).

Mr. Shalin Shah (PPT6) presented a snapshot of the outcome at Cancun with special reference to market mechanisms and methodologies for carbon tools and markets with respect to agriculture.

Mr. Robert Jordan of IFOAM and Mr. Mohammad of Qatar Foundation spoke about the urgent need to consolidate empirical evidences regarding large scale benefits of organic agriculture and remove ambiguities regarding long term benefits and sustainability of organic farming practices.

Nearly 50-60 participants converged at the side event. A memorandum of Understanding was also signed between NCCSD and IFOAM to jointly work together in support of convergence of initiatives, learnings and resources to mainstream agriculture including organic farming practices. The most important objective will be to establish a public administration perspective by which agriculture will be strengthened even through a livelihood imperative and in the process foster climate efficient agriculture to optimize photosynthesis based carbon capture.

Both institutions agreed on the need for

- Need based training and capacity building of farmers to recognize signals of stress and communicate with appropriate systems of governance at the local level through leadership approaches;
- Documenting empirical evidences of stresses and resilience of systems on a crop – specific basis;
- Synergies across policies, programmes and projects to remove distortions in regulations, markets and institutional mechanisms and harmonize across systems of public governance so that the farming community is able to make the best use of the principles of organic agriculture as a climate smart tool; and
- Highlight limits and limitations of our understanding of eco-system processes so that appropriate science and technology based support tools are mainstreamed to derive and consolidate empirical evidences regarding the benefits of organic farming / tradeoffs for sustainability.