

Negotiators buy more time for agriculture discussions

Doha, 13 December (Doreen Stabinsky) – The topic of agriculture under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change will continue to be discussed next year, with no decision adopted at the conference of Parties in Doha, Qatar.

At the final plenary of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) on Saturday, 1 December, Parties decided to continue their exchange of views at the next meeting of the subsidiary bodies in Bonn in June 2013. Strong differences over how to strike a balance between mitigation and adaptation and how to reflect the principles of the convention in the draft decision prevented agreement in the short time period allocated for SBSTA issues.

(The other subsidiary body is on implementation of the Convention, the SBI.)

The 2011 Durban decision on the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action (AWG-LCA), 2/CP.17 (paras. 75-77), under the item on cooperative sectoral approaches and sector-specific actions, had requested SBSTA at its 36th session to consider issues related to agriculture. According to decision 2/CP.17, the aim was to exchange views and for the COP to adopt a decision at COP18 in Doha. The exchange of views in Bonn at SBSTA 36 had not resulted in any text, and Parties continued the exchange in Doha starting on 28 November.

George Wamukoya from Swaziland and Alexandra Conliffe from Canada were appointed as co-facilitators by the SBSTA chair, Richard Muyungi of Tanzania.

At the first contact group meeting on 28 November, the co-facilitator Alexandra Conliffe opened the meeting, noting the importance of agriculture as an agenda item in Doha to determine further steps on the issue.

Malawi spoke on behalf of the African group, expressing their interest in having a decision in Doha. They noted there was an ongoing exchange of ideas in the group, but put forward possible

elements of a decision. The elements started by making reference to the objective of the Convention, the role of agriculture and food security, the importance of small farmers and the role of agriculture in the economy. The group proposed a process for submissions, which would be compiled by the Secretariat, then an in-session workshop on adaptation.

Gambia, on behalf of the LDCs, agreed with Malawi, adding the SBSTA should request Annex I Parties to mobilize resources in support to move the agriculture agenda forward.

The **European Union** noted the very useful exchange of views in Bonn, expressing an interest in building on that dialogue. They pointed to the uniqueness of the agriculture sector, emphasizing that food production is very sensitive to climate change and that impacts of climate change on food production are a threat for all. They also noted that adaptation is most important for smallholder farmers.

They echoed the view that Article 2 requires the stabilization of atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations to ensure that food production is not threatened, and that there was a need to produce more food while not increasing emissions. The EU also pointed out the view that adaptation and mitigation are closely linked and need to be dealt with together. They emphasized the need to increase resilience, productivity and efficiency. They called attention to the wide range of practices and technologies available for this end and pointed out that SBSTA's work could address the specific and technological challenges in the agriculture sector.

Ethiopia said that the group should follow the mandate of SBSTA, with a focus on food security, climate change impacts and different scenarios.

Tanzania said they were ready to engage and wanted a SBSTA decision to enable the work to begin. They noted that agriculture was not only about food security, but also the livelihood of local community, and negotiations should be

undertaken in that context. They further noted that sustainable development must be the priority for the work.

The Philippines emphasize that agriculture was not only about food and livelihood security, but it was also a crucial pillar of national security. The brunt of climate impacts is borne not only by the agricultural rural sector, but all who depend on it. They stated that SBSTA work must focus on and place due emphasis on adaptation, to enhance the ability of the agriculture sector to adapt to climate impacts.

Papua New Guinea agreed that food security is a very significant issue and said they will insist for coordination between agriculture and REDD+.

Bangladesh emphasized the special nature of agriculture. They noted that agriculture could be defined not merely as production, but to also include processing and distribution. This fact had implications for adaptation and mitigation, they added. They also noted that agriculture was a cultural issue.

Uruguay pointed out that as the consideration of agriculture was under the SBSTA process, it should be guided by the mandate of Article 9. They noted that to maintain productivity and food production, it will be difficult for the agriculture sector to reduce emissions, and the emissions in developing countries will be increasing. They added that there are real win-win opportunities to increase food production without increasing emissions. A key challenge then will be identifying actions to build resilience and reduce emissions intensity. They said that there is a need to expand the understanding of practices that can deliver multiple benefits.

The **United States** drew attention to relevant themes that they saw emerging about both process and substance. They said that the issue of adaptation and mitigation is a false dichotomy and that experts believe there are synergies. They added that if this could be fully explored, without imposing anything on anyone, the appearance of the dichotomy would go away. Beyond this, they suggested to look at what SBSTA could do to influence other activity within the UNFCCC, such as driving appropriate activities of the technology center through SBSTA recommendations.

Botswana highlighted that agriculture is very key for them and issues of food security very important. They said that yields are declining,

impacts are being felt now, and that shifts in rainfall are leading to a lack of hope among people. They made a request for considering loss and damage, related to the urgent and real situation of agriculture, and the need also for national adaptation plans to put this in perspective. They also highlighted that there are equity issues related to mobilizing resources to developing country economies.

New Zealand mentioned a need to consider the production aspects of agriculture, including productivity and efficiency. They said they wanted the focus of the work to be scientific and technical, guided by the mandate of SBSTA under Article 9.

China stressed that agriculture plays an important role in regard to food security, and that food security is of great importance for developing countries. They said that work on agriculture under the SBSTA should be consistent with the principles and provisions of the Convention, in particular with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. They said the discussions should emphasize how to fulfill the objective of the Convention, that food production is not threatened. They noted that agriculture is most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to low adaptation capacity and has already had serious impact on food production in developing countries. They added that for developing countries, adaptation is more important than mitigation. They suggested discussion on how to provide means of support through finance, technology and capacity building to help implement adaptation actions. This would include helping farmers using climate-friendly technologies for food security, to address climate change and achieve sustainable development.

Egypt also supported considering principles such as common but differentiated responsibilities and equity, and major points of technology transfer and finance.

India emphasized the importance of the Convention principles that the work, echoing China. They said it was important to give primacy to adaptation. They noted the differences between adaptation and mitigation and added that it was important to segregate the two and keep an emphasis on adaptation.

Costa Rica expressed the position that adaptation and mitigation are synergetic.

The contact group then moved into informal negotiations over several days, led by the co-facilitators. Discussions focused on the two tracks of substance and process, although many countries emphasized that decisions on process could not be taken until the substance of the work had been decided.

SBSTA Chair Muyungi reconvened the contact group at 8 pm on Saturday 1 December to close the contact group in advance of the SBSTA closing plenary. Many countries made statements in the contact group about the way forward, asking for more time to continue discussions in order to have a decision resulting from Doha.

Gambia noted the achievements of the week.

India noted that since discussions at the last meeting of the SBSTA in May, Parties had moved further apart. They said they did not see that further progress could be made at this meeting, and their understanding is that the agenda item should be taken to the next session of SBSTA.

Costa Rica indicated that they would like to see something come out of Doha and proceed with negotiations on the text over the next week.

Ethiopia, New Zealand, the European Union, Uruguay, South Africa and Tanzania also reflected positively on the work accomplished during the week and agreed to move forward towards a decision.

Argentina said that momentum was building between the technical negotiators and that the work should continue at the negotiator level before deciding to send a decision to the ministerial level. They noted that the negotiators knew what the issues were and what they had to solve.

Kenya pointed out that there were areas with commonalities and suggested the decision should focus on areas where they see convergence.

Malawi also indicated their desire to continue engaging in order to have a substantive decision taken at COP18.

China said they knew that agriculture was a crucial issue for all developing countries. They noted a lot of problems with the text, however, and difficulties that needed to be solved. They said the topic needed more time to discuss and solve these problems and supported India in their

suggestion to defer a decision to the next meeting of the SBSTA.

The chair then explained to the Parties the process, indicating that the SBSTA closing plenary would commence in an hour. He suggested that the COP president might give him a mandate to continue negotiations after the closing of the plenary, and that his expectation was to try to do that. He said he would request the COP president to give him a new mandate and more time, suggesting that negotiations might continue all day on Monday. He said from his experience, the negotiations might get more time. However, the discussions needed to close in the contact group in order to move to the SBSTA closing plenary.

Japan noted that they wanted to get an outcome in Doha.

Nicaragua reflected that a lot of progress had been made. They indicated that a lot of concerns still existed about mitigation, adaptation and common but differentiated responsibilities but asked to work for another two hours to decide if the work will require more time.

Argentina reiterated that progress had been made on the issue and asked to be given more time before concluding, keeping the discussions at the technical level and continue negotiating up to the last minute, as there was spirit in the room to continue.

The chair emphasized that he had no mandate to continue the negotiations and that he needed to close the contact group in order to proceed to the SBSTA closing plenary. He said his dream was to have a decision here in Doha.

The contact group had not drafted chair's conclusions for their work, so there was not an L. document to be considered during the closing plenary on Saturday 1 December. As each agenda item must actually be closed during the plenary accompanied by a concluding L. document, containing at least procedural conclusions for the agenda item, when the item was opened during the final plenary a procedural decision had to be crafted on the spot. At that point, numerous delegations took the floor to suggest to the chair how to move forward.

India noted that agriculture was a very important agenda item and expressed great disappointment that despite best efforts the group was not able to reach consensus. They emphasized that issues

connect with agriculture are of vital concern to India, as agriculture is not only a source of economic growth, but also a source of livelihood. They said the issue should be approached with great seriousness and a decision on the item should be presented to the Parties for further consideration. However as there is yet no decision to report to the COP president, they suggested that that recommendations from the SBSTA should state that they could not come to a conclusion for lack of time and that the discussion should be carried forward for further discussion at the next SBSTA.

Uruguay said that agriculture is vital for food security and it affects climate change. They expressed the view that SBSTA should focus on the technical and scientific elements related to agriculture also to maintain food production and food supply. They stated that the agriculture sector might not be able to cut emissions, as there was a need to feed a growing world population, and that an increase in emissions was more likely to be seen in countries with agricultural-based economies. They noted there was an opportunity to develop strategies to increase food production while reducing emissions. They also noted the need to focus on adaptation issues. They expressed the desire to move the issue forward, asking for more time to reach an agreement at this meeting.

Algeria said that the path laid out by India was wise, as they did not think it wise to put the burden of resolving this issue on ministers. They noted that there are issues not yet worked out technically, requiring further consideration on the technical level.

Bangladesh noted their dependence on agriculture and the importance of food security for the country. They said it was unfortunate that consensus could not be reached and that there was no outcome during this meeting. They expressed hope that this agenda item be given due time and importance, especially given the great length of deliberations. They said it was prudent to take the matter to the next SBSTA session – that if it cannot be delivered in Doha it should be transferred to the next session in Bonn.

Venezuela endorsed the position taken by India, flagging the importance of the agriculture issue for developing countries. They questioned why a technical issue would be passed to the Presidency

of the COP, in light of the fact that more time is needed, and requested a clarification of this from the chair.

The chair responded that he was not passing a technical issue to the COP President, but merely reporting the facts on the situation, consistent with his role as SBSTA chair.

Brazil stated that they were disheartened by the lack of progress, noting that technical discussions never got going. They said Parties engaged in a bracketing exercise, with a rearrangement of paragraphs, but little that was technical. They noted very little was tried in the context of discussions. Brazil said they had sought to ensure more time at the end of the contact group to enable more technical engagement, but that this was not possible. They indicated agreement with others that agriculture is an issue that demands technical, not political, consideration, and said that the presentation of the issue at the COP would be dangerous and unproductive to reach a good agreement. They suggested the best treatment would be to continue the work by the SBSTA at its next session, allowing a decision to be reached through adequate technical consideration.

Gambia, on behalf of LDCs, stated that agriculture is very essential to the development of Gambia and all LDCs, emphasizing that the sector was vital to the survival of LDCs. They suggested that any discussions deviating from Article 9 would not do justice to the discussions. They proposed to continue the agenda item at the next SBSTA, hopefully making a decision there.

Argentina noted the constructive debates and attitude to come to a decision, but that there was not sufficient time in technical discussions to get to more fundamental issues. They said that in order to negotiate at a technical level more time would be required. They agreed that the most appropriate way forward would be to continue at the next SBSTA, in order to arrive at a decision that reflects a balance between Parties, with valid scientific basis.

The **European Union** reminded Parties that in their opening statement, they had noted there was much to do in Doha. They said progress was made, but that the European Union still had concerns on some issues. They said it was important to initiate work on both adaptation and the contribution of agriculture to mitigation and food security. They said this should be done as

soon as possible and the message addressed to the COP.

Ethiopia said everyone was aware of the decision passed in Durban, requesting SBSTA to adopt a decision. They noted that not all Parties are against technical things, and that more technical work was needed. They said they would be happy if the COP would decide to give agriculture more time now, rather than move the item to the next session.

Nicaragua noted their concern with what they were hearing and that some wanted to throw a spanner into the work. They said that as a small country that survives and bases their economy on agriculture, that the issue of agriculture was closely linked to sovereignty and food security. They said that the whole lack of consensus needed to be discussed, and expressed concern that it is a problem when procedures are not respected based on the fact that there is no consensus. They suggested that the issue needed to be discussed further at the next SBSTA, rather than passing it on to ministers at the COP.

Cuba fully supported the proposal to postpone the discussion until the next meeting of the SBSTA. They noted the multifaceted nature of agriculture. They said that because the ministers would hold discussions on other issues, the matter should not be passed up to the COP, so that ministers' attention was not asked for prematurely. They added there was a need for more discussion on the technical level at the next meeting of the SBSTA.

The SBSTA chair said discussions could not continue. As there was no consensus, he would report accordingly to the COP. He said that the SBSTA would continue discussions according to rule 16 of the rules of procedure, which states that "Any item of the agenda of an ordinary session, consideration of which has not been completed at the session, shall be included automatically in the agenda of the next ordinary session, unless otherwise decided by the Conference of the Parties."

India raised a point of order asking under which agenda item of the COP this matter would be dealt with in the closing plenary, to which the chair responded agenda item 3, the reports of the Subsidiary Bodies.

Bolivia said there was a lot of technical work that still needs to be done. They emphasized that agriculture cannot be seen from an exclusively mitigation point of view, expressing concern about turning natural resources into mitigation measures. They said that 37% of the country produces agriculture goods that allow the rest of the country to eat, stressing that the agriculture sector cannot be allowed as part of the carbon market or viewed with purely a mitigation perspective. They added that agriculture must be viewed from adaptation and food security perspectives.

Costa Rica noted the importance of agriculture in the country not just for food security and production. They said that in 2007, the country promised to deliver carbon neutrality by 2021 and the agriculture sector was part of that effort. They noted that agriculture is the second largest emitting sector in the country and stressed the need to have the problem turned into part of the solution. They said they had wanted to reach an agreement on agriculture at this COP, a stance shared by more than 35 countries in the agriculture contact group.

The chair concluded that he had made his decision and invited Parties to speak on the topic at the high-level segment.

The final SBSTA report reflects the outcome of the final SBSTA plenary discussion on agriculture: "After several interventions by Parties, the SBSTA Chair ruled that there was no consensus amongst Parties to refer this matter to the COP for further consideration. The SBSTA Chair proposed and the meeting agreed that, in accordance with rule 16 of the Draft rules of procedure being applied, SBSTA would continue its consideration of this agenda item at its thirty-eighth session. The SBSTA Chair undertook to make a factual report on this to the COP President."