



Food Sovereignty and UNFCCC processes:

“Taking local struggles to the international level”

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The Bonn Climate Change Conference convened from 8-18 May 2017 at the UN Campus in Bonn, Germany. This was an important stepping-stone in the negotiations between COP22 and this year’s COP23, and included a number of subsidiary meetings: the 46th sessions of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI 46), the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA 46), and the third session of the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement (APA 1-3).

This was my first experience at these high level deliberations although I have been to 3 Conference of the Parties (COP) before, the last being COP22 in Marrakesh, Morocco. It was interesting to engage in these deliberations and learn how the working groups and implementing bodies take decisions to the COP meetings. Decisions taken at the global level have major impacts at the local level.

I worked closely with the Women and Gender Constituency, an official observer group with the climate negotiations, since gender equality and women’s rights are fundamental to combating climate change. I particularly followed the deliberations on Agriculture as I represented grass-root women who are striving and advocating for food sovereignty at local level, back home in South Africa.

The Paris Agreement has set us some key challenges when it comes to issues of land, food and agriculture. As the climate clock continues to count down, and after the awkward lack of progress on agriculture in Marrakesh, we hope that Parties have come to Bonn keen to find common ground than a sector in which to reduce emissions. It is the basis of food security, a source of livelihood for over three billion people, a contributor to nutrition and health, and a foundation of identity. A sector this complex must be approached carefully.¹

Parties must consider a number of key challenges; how can we safeguard food security and human rights in the face of climate change? How can we help our food systems and our food producers adapt? And how can we ensure equity and sustainable development in relation to the role of land and agriculture in climate action? *SBSTA agriculture negotiations are more relevant than ever!*

¹ ECO – NGO NEWSLETTER – SBSTA 46/May 2016, Bonn, Germany. www.climatenetwork.org/eco-newsletters.

Momentum for COP 21 in Paris was the agreement of the UN Member States by consensus on the inclusion of the Sustainable Development Goals in the UNFCCC negotiations. The 17 new sustainable development goals aim to eradicate extreme poverty, promote prosperity and people's well-being while protecting the environment by 2030.² SDG12 compels states to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns and SDG9 target 2.4 compels states to ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production.

Talking about SDG9 on sustainable food security, comments by co-facilitators of SBSTA on Agenda item 5 on issues relating to Agriculture, an internal tool to assist Parties in their future deliberations, the SBSTA committee considered the improvement of information systems, data generation and analysis for assessing vulnerability and resilience; development of policies, indicators and tools for the implementation and monitoring of ecosystem-based adaptation; enhancing cross-sectoral policy development and coordination; stakeholder engagement and training, including local communities, indigenous peoples and women. Enhancement of traditional knowledge sharing and enhancement of the communication and perception of agricultural stakeholders of long term trends of climate variations in local and regional levels.³

Civil Society feels that what counts at SB46, when it comes to climate change in agriculture & food security is the availability, access and quality of food security which leads up to sustainability. False solutions in agriculture need to be done away with and agroecology should be the way forward because the food security adaptation and mitigation co-benefits and visa-versa equals to building resiliency. There has to be a joint work programme on agriculture and food security. Land sector is already playing an increasingly important role in climate action, the land serves multiple functions: - (1) providing food (2) home (3) habitats (4) water and (5) livelihoods and much more.⁴

Climate change is already affecting many sectors of the natural and manmade sectors of the environment, and many of them are of particular relevance to the work and livelihoods of women. Women living in poverty are the most threatened by the dangers that stem from climate change, women in South Africa are not immune to these climate change threats. In urban areas, peri-urban areas and rural communities, women are largely dependent on natural resources and agriculture for their livelihoods. Climate change will mean that the supply of natural resources will be threatened, agriculture may become less viable. As it is, in many provinces of South Africa, farming activities take place on the edge of survival, even minor changes to rainfall patterns (especially coupled with increased severity of droughts and floods) threaten food security. Women living in rural and informal settlements are vulnerable to frequent extreme events like flooding.

The principles in the preamble to the Paris Agreement, including safeguarding food security and respecting human rights must be operationalized and fully integrated into all policies related to land. The Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement (APA) took centre stage, APA was tasked in Marrakech with delivering a detailed framework of actions to determine what, who, where and how to achieve the goals set out in the Paris Agreement. The Working Group was mandated to present the progress of their work by December 2018, and Bonn Conference was intended as a crucial

² <http://newsroom.unfccc.int/unfccc-newsroom/un-member-states-agree-sustainable-development-goals/>

³ SBSTA 46 agenda item 5 – issues relating to Agriculture, non-paper by Co-facilitators/Version of 16 May 2017.

⁴ Climate, Land, Ambition and Rights Alliance (CLARA) briefing endorsed by various organizations.

opportunity to move this forward. Although the timing and progress towards formalizing the Paris Agreement was reiterated and emphasized throughout the conference, little substantial progress was achieved.⁵

Personally, I feel there was progress, slowly moving in the right direction e.g.

- Efforts to put the Paris Agreement into action i.e. the Gender Action Plan which started its initial stage at this Bonn SBI 46 meeting.
- Requirements made to Parties to report regularly on their National Determined Contributions implementation efforts.

This was not a full-blown COP, it nevertheless attracted a wide range of stakeholders, much effort were made to operationalize the Paris Agreement, however there are still gaps that were left hanging to be dealt with during COP23 in November 2017.

Climate action must be urgently sealed up to limit global warming. Agroecology, disaster risk reduction strategies and careful management of ecosystem and water are key to strengthening communities' ability to cope with increasingly extreme weather events.³

Overall, there is a lot of work being done by the secretariats of different committees in trying to accommodate everyone and push for progress. It was encouraging to hear gender roles and local knowledge being acknowledged and emphasis placed on implementation at country level especially with Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) albeit very disheartening when realizing that my country was so thinly represented especially at the gender, food security and local level discussions. Women from all over the world gave brave interventions and bold discussions in most sectors of the UNFCCC, they worked tirelessly with zeal, diligence and tenacity. We still have a long way to go and need to keep raising our voices and local struggles, it is now time for implementation, enough with talking.

⁵ South African Adaptation Network Newsletter May 2017, Bonn Climate Conference Overview-by Candice Arendse and & Noel Oettle.