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COUNTRIES COME UP SHORT AGAIN AT COP26, AGRICULTURE LARGELY SIDELINED

Stronger Emissions Reduction Targets, Deeper Investments in Agroecology and Adaptation Needed

MINNEAPOLIS/BERLIN—The logistic and pandemic-challenged United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP26) concluded this weekend. At COP26, countries once again failed to meet the urgency of the climate crisis, including for the world’s food and farming systems, stated the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP).

Governments fell short on emission reduction commitments to meet the 1.5°C target, consistent with the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report. Workstreams on agriculture continued without resolution, side-stepping the need to both reduce emissions from global meat and dairy companies and invest in more climate-resilient, agroecological farming systems. Countries continued to spend vast amounts of time and resources attempting to set rules for a global carbon market, despite clear evidence that such market-based approaches are deeply flawed, increase inequality and fail to meet the urgency of the climate crisis.

“Perhaps because of the imminence of the climate emergency detailed in the IPCC report, at this COP, delegates negotiated Article 6 with more attention than in past COPs to reducing global carbon emissions,” said IATP Senior Policy Analyst Steve Suppan. “Prior to the COP, there were two positive developments: 1) IPCC scientists reported that biogenic carbon (e.g., soil carbon sequestration) does not offset fossil fuel emissions, and 2) the Science Based Targets initiative’s (SBTi) new Corporate Net Zero Standard will not accept forestry and agriculture-based offset credits as meeting the scientific criteria of its new standard. However, more COP delegate time and energy continued to be devoted into legitimizing emissions offset markets than to mobilizing public finance under Article 6.8 to enable the most vulnerable countries to adapt to climate change. That skewed negotiating priority was shocking, in view of the IPCC and SBTi reports, but it wasn’t surprising.”

“Net-zero claims by both countries and companies that rely deeply on land-based offsets continue to hold back efforts to meet a 1.5°C target,” said Ben Lilliston, director of rural strategies and climate change at IATP. “Just as countries have to come to terms with fossil fuel subsidies and a phaseout of coal, they need to respond to rising emissions from the factory farm system driven by global meat and dairy companies.”

The Global Methane Pledge, signed by more than 100 governments, represents a significant step in acknowledging the urgent need to slash emissions from this short-lived pollutant. The commitment to reduce methane emissions by 30% by 2030, and to hold a methane ministerial each year to assess progress, offers an opportunity to hold countries accountable. But the pledge is weak in its commitment to take on a major source of methane: large-scale, industrial meat and dairy production. Agriculture contributes around 40% of global anthropogenic sources of methane emissions, with livestock accounting for [32% of agriculture emissions](#). The pledge should include a timeline and concrete targets for methane reductions from large-scale industrial livestock.

While challenged by the pandemic, COP26 continued a pattern of poor organizing by the United Nations officials, resulting in the exclusion of many developing country delegates and civil society participants. Barriers to full participation by all countries and civil society involvement led to a weaker agreement.

Prior to COP26, IATP released a [series of publications](#) including: an analysis and critique of global meat giant JBS’ net zero pledge; a primer on the Task Force on Scaling Voluntary Carbon Markets (TSVCM); an examination of

meat and dairy companies' net zero pledges; a look at the International Emissions Trading Association (IETA); and an analysis of new trade policies (including Europe's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism) and how these policies can align with climate goals.

During COP26, IATP cohosted a [side event](#) on November 8 with Greenpeace International, Global Witness, Amnesty International and ActionAid International. The event, titled "Net Zero smoke and mirrors, a story of betrayal," made a strong case against carbon market offsetting. In net-zero pledges, countries and companies often rely heavily on offsets, rather than real emissions cuts. Net-zero pledges are voluntary pledges and not attached to any enforcement mechanisms. "Voluntary schemes are no match for regulatory schemes," said Shefali Sharma, director of IATP Europe, during the side event.

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Based in Minneapolis with offices in Washington, D.C., and Berlin, Germany, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. To learn more, visit: www.iatp.org.