



About Karen Hansen-Kuhn

International Program Director for IATP, Karen Hansen-Kuhn has been working on trade and economic justice since the beginning of the NAFTA debate, focusing especially on bringing developing countries' perspectives into public debates on trade, food security and economic policy.

About IATP

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. IATP is headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota with offices in Washington D.C. and Geneva.

In global climate negotiations: Agriculture not just one more sector

MINNEAPOLIS, APRIL 16, 2010* — Any international negotiations or initiatives on climate change and agriculture must begin with recognition of the multifunctionality of agriculture. It is not just one more sector. It is the source of foods all humans need to live and the basis of rural livelihoods; especially in many developing countries where the majority of the population works on the land. A multifunctional approach to agriculture is also necessary for the sustainable management of ecosystems to benefit local populations. This was a central conclusion of the International Assessment on Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), a process involving more than 400 experts from around the world and endorsed by more than 50 governments. The IAASTD concluded that “business as usual is not an option” in an age of climate change and instead emphasized the importance of developing low-input, sustainable agriculture to increase food security and strengthen rural livelihoods.

Agribusiness companies and their supporters are promoting genetically engineered crops as the solution to climate change and food security. They advocate the use of this resource-intensive technology designed for large-scale monocrop agriculture in the North to very different situations in the South. There is no evidence that expensive GE technology can reliably increase yields, much less support food sovereignty. It is a technology in search of a market.

Public research, extension and investment is needed to develop agricultural practices that reduce the use of imported, fossil fuel-based inputs; improve the organic content of soil (and therefore sequester carbon); increase yields and reduce post-harvest losses; manage water supplies for the common good; respond to changing climatic conditions and support food sovereignty. Continued dependence on monocrop agriculture is unsustainable, both because of its tendency to concentrate wealth and because of the risks created by reductions in biodiversity. Agricultural innovation must be the result of active partnerships with local farmers and communities, especially women, who are often the guardians of traditional knowledge. Such innovations must respond to their specific environments and interests and conserve local

biodiversity. However, the continued expropriation of their knowledge in the form of patented products should be prohibited. Any solutions developed with public support should be public goods, not subject to rules on intellectual property rights that restrict the sharing of information.

Significant new investments will be needed for agriculture to adapt to the impacts of climate change and to reduce emissions. These investments must not depend on revenues from the sale of carbon offset credits, which are subject to fraud and have the potential to increase price volatility. Speculation on commodity markets has already destabilized prices and hurt farmers and consumers around the world. Industrialized countries should provide significant funding to developing-country governments as compensation for the damages resulting from their greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, public support for agriculture within rich countries should be directed to supporting environmentally sustainable and socially just food production practices, primarily for local markets.

*This comment was produced in preparation for the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

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