



INSTITUTE FOR AGRICULTURE AND TRADE POLICY
PRESS RELEASE

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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 an office in Geneva.

Empty global climate deal leaves agriculture behind

Secret, last-minute tactics symbolize flawed negotiating process

CANCÚN, MEXICO – A watered-down United Nations climate deal reached early this morning missed another opportunity to support climate-resilient agriculture and global food security, according to the Minneapolis-based Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP). Overall, the agreement represents a step back from legally-binding commitments to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions set in the Kyoto Protocol, and a step forward for non-binding pledges from last year's Copenhagen Accord. This significantly weakened framework is a severe blow to agriculture, a sector most vulnerable to climate change.

“This weak agreement is a retreat from serious efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and that is a tremendous loss for farming communities everywhere,” said IATP's Shefali Sharma. “Farmers, particularly in developing countries, are already experiencing the effects of climate change through increased droughts, floods and other extreme weather. However, this agreement does not prioritize agriculture adaptation and fails to address the complex linkages between food security, livelihoods and ecological resilience.”

In the final hours of the negotiations, industrialized countries led by New Zealand, United States and Canada, attempted and failed to fast-track a standalone work program on agriculture. Though a side issue in the negotiations, significant efforts were made by New Zealand and others to bypass the impasse on “cross-sectoral approaches” to move ahead on agriculture with a primary focus on mitigation, rather than adaptation. Developing countries have opposed a standalone decision on agriculture without a framework that deals with other sectors that contribute to greenhouse gases.

The climate talks in Cancún were plagued by a chaotic and mostly exclusive negotiating process with close to 150 governments often left out of negotiating “green rooms,” multiple versions of texts, and no clear schedules and timetables. Additionally, civil society groups, who have provided the political momentum for a global climate treaty, were further restricted access from the negotiations in Cancún.

“In Copenhagen and now in Cancún, we see the mistakes repeated from another troubled multilateral institution, the World Trade Organization, which is stuck in quicksand,” said Sharma. “This process must be transparent and fully inclusive of all countries and allow civil society to actively engage. If not, meaningful progress on a global climate treaty is not possible as is evident from the Cancún outcome.”

The agreement continues to emphasize the role of carbon markets in climate finance, further paving the way for agriculture to serve as an offset market for polluters in developed countries. Climate finance approaches in the agreement continue to be far too little to enable Least-Developed Countries, African States, and Small Island Developing States to adapt to climate change, particularly in agriculture and rural areas.

“Governments are still counting on utopian expectations for carbon trading revenues to finance climate mitigation and adaptation,” said IATP’s Steve Suppan. “Governments need the financial services industry to pony up additional money through a transactions tax—it’s the very least they should do after the ongoing public bailout of their folly and depredations.”

Contrary to the lack of real progress from governments, IATP and other civil society leaders gathered at a number of forums and side events throughout the Cancún climate talks to share strategies for more equitable solutions to climate change. At event after event, farm groups consistently called for agroecological approaches that strengthen food security and spoke critically of carbon markets.

IATP published a series of papers on climate and agriculture prior to the Cancún climate talks and blogged throughout the two weeks of negotiations. You can find out more about IATP’s climate work at www.iatp.org/climate.

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