COP21 agreement takes steps to recognise agriculture

Agriculture finally received a welcome boost in the new climate agreement that was concluded at COP21 in Paris, France, this month. The agreement was reached after two weeks of tense negotiations among 195 countries. The adopted agreement now includes important clauses around food production, stating that the countries “recognize the fundamental priority of safeguarding food security and ending hunger, and the particular vulnerabilities of food production systems to the adverse impacts of climate change”.

SACAU is still concerned that the final COP21 climate agreement fails to mention agriculture by name, despite this sector being one of the most crucial for African countries. “Despite the indirect language, this is a significant improvement from the draft text published in November ahead of the meeting which completely side-lined agriculture,” said Dr Manyewu Mutamba an Analyst for Economics and Policy at SACAU.

The long awaited binding global agreement commits to a common goal of limiting global warming to “well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and outlines mechanisms to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

One of its three objectives is “to pursue a transformation towards sustainable development that fosters climate resilient and low greenhouse gas emission societies and economies, that does not threaten food production and distribution”. “Given the difficult road that agriculture has travelled in these negotiations, this is a significant victory that places the sector in a strong position for the detailed negotiations on how the broad objectives set out in this agreement will be achieved,” said Dr Mutamba.

Additionally, SACAU hopes that this agreement will lead to the development of robust mechanisms for mobilizing finance, technology, capacity and institutional changes needed to support the transition to a climate resilient agriculture. “The negotiations on agriculture-related issues currently underway within the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice (SBSTA) now need to be accelerated and broadened in scope to ensure a comprehensive response,” adds Dr Mutamba.

As thousands of delegates made their way to #COP21 to negotiate a binding climate change agreement, SACAU took to social media to demand that agriculture be included in the final agreement.

Under the hashtag #IncludeAgriCOP21, SACAU made its demands heard across the sector. The organisation’s Facebook page increased by more than 3500 followers while a newly started Twitter account sent out regular messages on the impact of agriculture on the continent.

The campaign reached tens of thousands of social media users. While an agreement has been signed, SACAU will continue to use social media to ensure that agriculture is not left out of the implementation process. Join us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter @sacau_media.
The Goal
The agreement aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty.

It hopes to achieve this with three things:
- Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels as well as recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change;
- Increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development but in a manner that does not threaten food production;
- Making finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development.

Main elements covered by the agreement
These include issues of mitigation, a transparency system, adaptation, loss and damage as well as support. Mitigation refers to reducing emissions fast enough to achieve the temperature goal. A transparency mechanism coupled with a global stock-take would allow for some accounting for climate action. Adaptation refers to strengthening the ability of countries to deal with climate impacts. The clause on loss and damage strengthens their ability to recover from climate impacts. Lastly, support (which includes finance) for nations to build clean, resilient futures.

Letter from the CEO
It was a long two weeks earlier this month as more than 38 000 delegates worked around the clock to finalise the Paris Agreement on climate change.

In November SACAU noticed that agriculture was not in the draft agreement. We knew we could not allow that to go unchallenged.

SACAU led the calls to include agriculture in the final agreement with a social media campaign under the banner #IncludeAgriCOP21.

We are relieved that agriculture finally received recognition in the new binding agreement. Hopefully, this is a new beginning for the sector.

We expect that this inclusion will give much needed traction to negotiations on agriculture related issues that seemed to have lost momentum and direction.

But much more still needs to be done to go beyond well-meaning pronouncements.

After COP21, we expect even more urgent action to identify and roll out the most promising technologies and practices that will help farmers to continue farming under a changing climate.

It is important that financial commitments to support such adaptation investments are respected and sustained over time.

Without this support and improved mechanisms for delivering it, farmers will remain at risk from the devastating impacts of climate change.

As 2015 comes to an end, we commit to working with you for a better, climate smart, agriculture in Africa.

Let 2016 be the year of the farmer.
Roadmap to practical implementation

Now that the Paris Agreement has been adopted by the COP, participating countries must begin to prepare for implementation.

The agreement is to be deposited at the United Nations Headquarters in New York and will be opened for signature for one year from 22 April 2016.

The agreement will enter into force once at least 55 Parties to the Convention accounting in total for at least an estimated 55 percent of the total global greenhouse gas emissions have deposited their instruments of ratification.

The agreement asks for specific actions.

These include that countries will submit updated climate plans – called Intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs) – every five years, thereby steadily increasing their ambition in the long-term.

Emissions should peak “as soon as possible” and then be rapidly reduced. There are five-year reviews, and “the efforts of all parties will represent a progression over time”, which means at each step countries should increase their levels of emission cuts from today’s agreements.

All countries need to rapidly move from fossil fuel energy to renewable sources. But the challenge is larger for the developing world, they need funds to “leapfrog the fossil fuel age”. A key part of the agreement provides USD 100 billion per year by 2020, and more than that after 2020 to support such actions.

Governments agreed that they will work to define a clear roadmap to increase climate finance to USD 100 billion per year by 2020 while also before 2025 setting a new goal on the provision of finance from the USD 100 billion floor.

This will be underlined by the agreement’s robust transparency and accounting system, which will provide clarity on countries’ implementation efforts, with flexibility in line with countries’ differing capabilities.

All countries will submit adaptation communications, in which they may detail their adaptation priorities, support needs and plans. Developing countries will receive increased support for adaptation actions and the adequacy of this support will be assessed.

The existing Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage will be significantly strengthened.

The agreement includes a robust transparency framework for both action and support. The framework will provide clarity on countries’ mitigation and adaptation actions, as well as the provision of support. At the same time, it recognizes that Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States have special circumstances.

The agreement includes a global stocktake starting in 2023 to assess the collective progress towards the goals of the agreement. The stocktake will be done every five years.

The agreement includes a compliance mechanism, overseen by a committee of experts that operates in a non-punitive way.
Post-COP21: What is next?

With the end of COP21 on 12 December 2015, SACAU is pushing ahead to put the focus firmly on agriculture.

SACAU president Dr Theo de Jager noted that the organisation had gone to COP21 with the goal to put agriculture into the agreement. While the organisation is pleased that food security was addressed, De Jager says that agriculture must be explicitly included.

“We need to make the countries aware of the fact that food security and agricultural issues are not the same thing,” he said. “Food security is an issue of the body whereas Agriculture is about people, agriculture is a major issue for us in Africa and it effects half of the population.”

COP21 did allow SACAU to meet with various farmer organisations from across the world and De Jager noted that they would still continue to maintain and improve these relationships. “We are involved in a number of initiatives such as pushing for mechanisation and reduction of carbon footprints,” he said. “We are a part of the Climate Smart Agriculture Alliance.”

But the future of SACAU may lie in becoming more independent. “Up till now we have been putting pressure through other parties and maybe in the future we should start creating initiatives of our own,” the SACAU president added.

De Jager pointed to a major climate change issue in the region “One of the big things we are looking at is that in every year, in winter, we have our Savannah burn down which releases a lot of black carbon into the atmosphere,” he said. “We are looking at liaising with the Climate Smart Agriculture Alliance.”

When it comes to the impact of the Paris agreement, De Jager says that African farmers may not see the results. “In the short term, we might see a shift in priorities in climate funds but I don’t think we will see tangible results for some time,” he said.

According to De Jager, we will only see some change after the SBSTA’s (Subsidiary Bodies on Scientific and Technical Advice) meet in June 2016 in Bonn to give content to the Paris Agreement.

“We can add that more than 80% of the individual country commitments refer to agriculture programs. We feel given that, and the fact that the agreement does refer to forestry as a sector, opens the door for agriculture to be included too,” he said.

De Jager took the time to thank all the African farmers’ representatives who attended COP21, and all the friends of farmers who also worked hard to ensure that agriculture gets included.