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“Tropical Agriculture Gears up for Climate Change: The Case of Costa Rica” Side Event Report

Overseas Environmental Cooperation Center, Japan (OECC)
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This is a report of a side event held at the 18th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP18) from November 26th to December 8th 2012, in Doha, Qatar.

- Title : “Tropical Agriculture Gears up for Climate Change: The Case of Costa Rica”
- Date : 13:15-14:45, Friday, December 7th, 2012
- Organizer(s) : Costa Rica
- Venue : Side Event Room 8, Qatar National Convention Center, Qatar, Doha
- Presenter(s) : David Williams (Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture: IICA), Gloria Abraham (Minister of Agriculture and Livestock of Costa Rica: MAG), René Castro (Minister of Environment, Energy and Telecommunications of Costa Rica: MINAE), and Marianella Feoli (Fundecooperación)

■ Summary

- At the outset of the side event, Marianella Feoli, moderator, stressed that agriculture constitutes a key building block of Costa Rican economy and trade. She also stated that the agricultural sector is responsible for approximately 37% of the country’s total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions – one of the reasons various mitigation efforts have been undertaken in this sector.

1. David Williams (IICA): “Some national experiences in tropical agriculture in the face of climate change: promoting interministerial synergies in Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico and Uruguay”

- Mr. Williams gave brief explanations about the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) at the beginning of his presentation. According to him, its mandate includes, *inter alia*, providing information and technical assistance in agriculture for its 34 member states in Latin America, and thus contributing to their sustainable development. And climate change is one of the focus areas of the institute.
- The strategic objective of the IICA is to “enhance the sustainability and resilience of agricultural systems in ways that improve rural livelihoods and mitigate the negative impact of agriculture on the environment through the integrated management of natural

resources.” In order to achieve this goal, the IICA established a web-based platform to foster information exchange.

- The presentation specifically focused on projects currently underway in some of the member states with the goal of “strengthening synergies between the ministries of agriculture and the ministries of the environment to improve agriculture’s adaptation to climate change.” To this end, workshops have been conducted with divergent priorities depending on each target country, ranging from reviewing national climate change strategies and policy framework, defining adequate mitigation and adaptation measures, and analyzing and evaluating progress made thus far.
- These workshops helped identify actions to be undertaken in each country, such as establishment of agrometeorological information systems, strengthening national delegations with teams of experts, encouraging coordinated actions for adaptation, and involving both the public and private sectors. Mr. Williams concluded his presentation by affirming that there is a consensus that synergies among the agricultural, livestock, environmental, and academic sectors, as well as with NGOs and other relevant stakeholders, are essential for these key actions to be accomplished so that the challenge of climate change can be addressed more effectively at the national level.

2. Gloria Abraham (MAG): “Costa Rica’s vision towards the challenge of climate change in agriculture”

- Prior to the presentation, a short video clip on Costa Rica’s ongoing GHG reduction initiatives in the agriculture sector was shown. It featured, *inter alia*, organic agriculture, stations for meteorological data collection, pesticide reduction measures, water saving and recycling, carbon neutral certification for banana and coffee production, low-carbon milk production, and a carbon neutral tropical forest zone. The video concluded with a declaration that Costa Rica’s national objective is to achieve carbon neutrality by 2021.
- Ms. Abraham discussed Costa Rica’s public policies for the agriculture sector and rural development for 2010-2021, in which compatibility of mitigation, adaptation, and food security is considered as an essential component. She presented some specific ongoing projects in the agriculture sector, such as climate smart family farming, win-win initiatives in sugar production that integrate both carbon footprint measurement and biodiversity protection, low-emission banana production systems and climate smart dairy farming.
- A large portion of the presentation was dedicated to Costa Rica’s unique “coffee NAMA”, as “coffee is part of national identity” in the words of the minister. The coffee NAMA is designed to be a comprehensive low-emission coffee production mechanism that

encompasses fertilizer reduction, energy and water efficiency and agroforestry systems. The coffee NAMA is symbolized the first carbon neutral coffee in the world: “Coopedota,” certified in 2011. Ms. Abraham noted at the end of her presentation that further research and technology transfer to help small- and medium-sized agricultural enterprises to adopt climate smart measures is needed for the country to achieve the carbon neutral goal by 2021.

3. René Castro (MINAET): “Eco-competitiveness: placing the right incentives for a green growth economy”

- Mr. Castro first presented some relevant statistical data, noting that: 1) forest coverage and GDP have been growing hand in hand in the country since 1987; 2) Costa Rica’s energy intensity is lower than most of the major economies, although the former has been stagnant for a long period of time mainly due to the inefficient transport system, and 3) Costa Rica has been steadily reducing CO₂ emissions in recent years.
- He subsequently presented measures to be implemented in key sectors to achieve the goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2021, including introduction of fuel efficient taxis and buses in the transport sector, further emission reduction efforts in the production process of coffee, dairy and banana in the agriculture sector, and diversification of energy production, including increased use of renewable energy.
- Referring to a funnel analogy, the minister then presented Costa Rica’s vision for survival amid increasingly fierce eco-competitions around the globe. He noted that any state or firm will be obliged to take a sustainable path irrespective of their size in the future in which availability of natural resources will be increasingly limited. The above-mentioned carbon neutral *Coopedota* coffee is a case in point that shows Costa Rica’s commitment to sustainability to the world.

■ **Q&A**

Q. (Unidentified): Do you have the intention of incorporating management of agro waste in the coffee NAMA?

A. Mr. Castro: Farmers are encouraged to plant trees in the coffee farms and grow coffee plants in their shadow.

Ms. Abraham: We plan to implement NAMAs for other agricultural products, such as sugar case and dairy.

Q. (Representative of the Danish Parliament): What are the cost implications of eco-labeling? Would the certified products tend to be more expensive?

A. Mr. Castro: It is inevitable that prices become higher, but the difference in pricing should be interpreted as a premium put on the original price.

Q. (Representative of the GIZ): Overall, Costa Rica's initiatives are very impressive, and achieving carbon neutrality by 2021 is a very ambitious goal. However, in terms of the timeframe, nine years seems too short to attain it. What kind of support would you expect from the international community to accelerate GHG emission reductions?

A. Mr. Castro: Remaining time is indeed very limited. We are particularly in need of the following three types of support:

1. direct investment in the transport and energy sectors, especially for developing renewable energy sources;
2. technology transfer;
3. international knowledge exchange/sharing programs

Q. (Representative of the American Chemical Society): Did you need to convince small-sized corporations to initiate low-carbon initiatives? How did you show the benefits to them?

A. Mr. Castro: We certainly had a difficult time in convincing companies to initiate the projects regardless of their size. But the Costa Rican culture (non-confrontational and patient) facilitated the process.

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