



SOIL CARBON NOTES / EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT

UNFCCC COP 28 IN DUBAI: WHAT ARE THE MAIN RESULTS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE INTERNATIONAL “4 PER 1000” INITIATIVE?



In December 2023, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held its 28th Conference of the Parties in Dubai. Many observers were only interested in one subject: whether the planned phase-out of fossil fuels would be included in the final declaration. In the end, a phrase that only COPs have the secret of did appear in the Dubai final document: “transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade, so as to achieve net zero by 2050 in keeping with the sciences”. We can acknowledge a certain advance in this area, since this is the first time there has been talk of “moving away from fossil fuels”.

But this much-publicized breakthrough, fantastic for some and insufficient for others, actually conceals some interesting and unprecedented advances in terms of recognizing the role of agriculture and food systems in the fight against climate change.

Observers interested in agriculture, food systems, as well as land, soil and soil health, had already noticed an increased focus on these issues at COP 27 in Sharm El

Sheikh, in the negotiations and discussions, with the establishment of the “Sharm El Sheikh Joint-Work on Implementation of Climate Action on Agriculture and Food Security”, and with the presence of numerous pavilions related to agriculture and food systems in both the blue and green zones of the COP. The same observers were able to make similar observations this year in Dubai, but on a different scale: four facts bear witness to this situation:

- References to agriculture in the adaptation section of the GST decision but no significant progress on Article 6 of the Paris Agreement (article on international carbon trading).
- The adoption of a Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action by the Heads of State of 134 countries (this figure has since risen to 159) at the very start of COP28 (December 2) as a major achievement under the presidency’s Food Systems and Agriculture Agenda.
- The presentation by the FAO, during the food, agriculture, and water day (December 10), of its roadmap:

“Achieving SDG 2 without exceeding the 1.5°C threshold: a global roadmap or How the transformation of agri-food systems through accelerated climate action will contribute to ensuring food security and nutrition, today and tomorrow”.

- The large number of side events in the blue and green zones of COP28 dealing with subjects related to agriculture, agroecology, soils, soil health and soil carbon sequestration.

DECISIONS OF COP28 IN DUBAI (OUTCOME OF THE FIRST GLOBAL STOCK TAKE AND MATTERS RELATED TO ARTICLE 6 OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT)

Although not as important as the Paris agreement in terms of scope and content, the final Dubai decision does mark some progress in terms of mentioning somehow the phase-out of fossil fuels, even if it does not specify the exact method or deadline. But let's not be too pessimistic: the fact that this mention was made at the end of a meeting held in a region that is a major producer of fossil fuels, is a real symbol that marks a certain inflexion. Sometimes we need to make use of our pragmatic optimism to welcome steps in the right direction, however small they may be.

In terms of topics of particular interest to the “4 per 1000” International Initiative, the final document mentions in the “Mitigation” section, in paragraph 33, a specific reference to the importance of preserving, protecting and restoring nature and ecosystems to meet the temperature targets of the Paris Agreement, including efforts to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030, and (the importance of) other terrestrial and marine ecosystems acting as greenhouse gas sinks and conserving biodiversity in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. This can be seen as an overture to agriculture and forestry, since agrosystems are ecosystems.

Nevertheless, a more rigorous analysis of the document shows that specific references to land-use management, sustainable agriculture, resilient food systems, nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches are only mentioned in paragraph 55, which is part of the “adaptation” section (along with paragraphs 63 b) and d)). This is part of the compromises made during the negotiations to satisfy the developing countries, which attach greater importance to the need for agriculture to adapt to climate change, rather than as a means of mitigating it. It is worth noting, however, that the paragraph ends by stating that these approaches must be built on the best available science (without giving any details on the meaning of this expression) as much as on the knowledge of indigenous populations and local knowledge systems. While it is regrettable that the text makes no mention of agroecology, the reference to the need to base actions on science as well as traditional know-how is noteworthy. Another regret is the absence of any mention of the importance of soil and soil health... We still have a long way to go...

Another area of concern is the lack of progress in negotiations on the operationalization of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, notably on the issue of ecological avoidance, including avoided deforestation. While generally work on cooperative approaches (Art. 6.2) and the article 6.4 mechanism will continue in Bonn in June 2024, and some progress could be made regarding the work program under Article 6.8, this particular issue, dealt with by the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), may not be decided by the COP until 2028, when the rules, modalities and procedures of the mechanism are examined. The vagueness surrounding voluntary carbon market issues is likely to persist for years to come.

COP28 UAE DECLARATION ON SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE, RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS AND CLIMATE ACTION



In fact, the final document of COP 28 in Dubai, adopted on December 13, i.e. after the scheduled closure of COP 28, refers to these issues in relation to agriculture, thanks to (or because of) the declaration on sustainable agriculture, resilient food systems and climate action, adopted by the Heads of Delegation on December 2, i.e. 11 days earlier. This is a good example of large-scale political decisions that can make a real difference. What's more, 134 countries signed the declaration when it was published, but to date the figure has risen to 159, i.e. an additional 25 countries, including several early absentees such as Argentina, Kenya, Mali, Russia and Turkey.

On the other hand, India, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Niger, etc. are still non-signatories.

This document clearly and unambiguously states that “any pathway to fully achieve the long-term objectives of the Paris Agreement must include agriculture and food systems”. It also makes the link between individual and collective commitments to the 2030 Agenda, the 3 Rio Conventions (Climate Change, Biodiversity and Desertification), and the UN Food Systems Summit.

It proclaims the common will to work collectively to achieve 5 objectives:

- Developing activities to help farmers, fishermen and food producers adapt and become more resilient;
- Promoting food security and nutrition for vulnerable populations;
- Support for workers in agriculture and food systems;
- Strengthening integrated water management in agriculture and food systems;
- And maximizing climate and environmental benefits while containing and reducing the negative impacts associated with agriculture and food systems by protecting and restoring land and natural ecosystems, enhancing soil health and biodiversity, and moving away from high greenhouse gas emitting practices towards more sustainable production and consumption approaches, including reducing food waste and promoting sustainable aquaculture products.

To achieve these targets, countries are committing, “according to their national circumstances”, to include agriculture and food systems in their climate action by 2050, by strengthening their respective and joint efforts in 5 areas:

- Integrate agriculture and food systems into national adaptation plans, NDCs and other related strategies before COP 30 is convened.
- Revising or orienting public policies related to agriculture and food systems to promote activities that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen resilience, while reducing food loss and waste, and ecosystem degradation.
- Continue to develop and improve access to financing to adapt and transform agriculture and food systems in response to climate change
- Accelerate and expand scientific innovations and local and indigenous knowledge that promote sustainable production and ecosystem resilience

- Strengthen the multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization.

Noting that they have just seven years left (the document was drafted in 2023) to achieve these common goals, the countries commit to improving national inter-ministerial coordination, and to taking advantage of relevant regional and global meetings to share experiences and collaborate. They look forward to COP 29 to consider the next steps in 2025 and beyond. The implementation of the declaration will be supported by a technical collaborative cooperation, which will aim to bring together leading institutions and platforms to coherently offer the quality technical cooperation that countries demand.

The declaration, which is non-binding, represents a major step in the right direction, with 159 countries committing to include agriculture and food systems in their national policies (starting with their NDCs¹) to combat climate change, with almost immediate effect, since it validates a review clause at COP 29 in a year’s time, to define future steps.

And the text explicitly mentions soil health, which is a first. However, there is still no mention of agroecology...

THE FAO’S ROADMAP FOR ACHIEVING SDG 2 WITHOUT EXCEEDING THE 1.5°C THRESHOLD

The day of COP 28 dedicated to food, agriculture and water (December 10) was an opportunity for the FAO to present its strategy for transforming agri-food systems in line with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda (in particular its objective no. 2 on world hunger) and the Paris Agreement (not exceeding the +1.5°C threshold for global warming). The approach is designed to respect the principles of integration, coherence, coordination, and progressiveness, extending from COP 28 to COP 30.

This roadmap, intended not only for the FAO, but also and above all for decision-makers, civil society, and businesses, is structured around 10 areas of action (in order of appearance: livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, crops, healthy diets for all, forests and wetlands, soil and water, food waste and loss, clean energy, inclusive policies, and data), including 120 recommended actions. The document also includes quantified targets and milestones. In terms of topics of interest to the “4 per 1000” International Initiative, the following targets are worth noting:

- By 2040, 10 Gt CO₂ of additional carbon will have been sequestered in crops and grasslands between 2025 and 2050.
- By 2030, all farmers and livestock breeders will have access to globally recognized solutions for tracking their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

¹ It may be noted in passing that this corresponds to Objective A1 of the 2050 Strategic Plan of the International “4 per 1000” Initiative, namely : To ensure that the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of all UNFCCC Parties contain references to soil health and soil organic carbon (SOC), and that these are taken into account in their sustainable agriculture development programs.

- By 2030, methane emissions from the livestock sector will have been reduced by 25% compared with 2020.
- By 2050, total crop and livestock productivity will have grown by 1.5% and 1.7% per year respectively world-wide.

With two targets per action area, the global objectives of “a world population following healthy diets” and “agri-food systems representing net carbon sinks (-1.5 Giga tonnes of CO₂ equivalent per year)” should be achieved. The aim is to make the most of the potential of agri-food systems to help combat climate change by reducing GHG emissions (carbon dioxide CO₂, methane CH₄ and nitrous oxide N₂O) and the capacity of soils to sequester carbon.

The document presented is in fact the 1st part of a total of 3, of the roadmap, and is intended to present the global vision; volume 2, to be presented in 2024 at COP 29, will be entitled “moving from a global to a regional vision and from vision to costing and financing”; and volume 3, scheduled for 2025 for COP 30, will be devoted to “establishing national action plans, monitoring and accountability”.

This is clearly an ambitious FAO program, built along the lines of a strategic plan in line with the international organization’s mandate to play a major role in combating climate change through agrifood systems. In this respect, the following points are worth noting:

- The clear reference to “agri-food systems” and not just “food systems”. The biobased products sectors will appreciate this nuance, and their inclusion in this global action.
- The strong articulation of agriculture, livestock, fisheries, aquaculture and forestry with terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, soil and water, healthy diets, inclusive policies, food loss and waste, clean energy (why the singular?) and data. A sort of broad inventory, but one that contains the essential points.
- A strong emphasis on water rather than soil in the “soil and water” action area, with an initial focus on soil health and its measurement and assessment, particularly in terms of carbon content. Soil health” is mentioned several times in the document in relation to different areas of action, which is encouraging in terms of taking this issue into account.
- The absence of any explicit reference to “agroecology” (except for the expression “agroecological and socio-economic contexts”), in favor of “regenerative agriculture (and climate-smart agriculture)” or “regenerative farming practices” (in particular to preserve soils and promote soil carbon).

SIDE EVENTS DURING COP 28 ON AGRICULTURE, AGROECOLOGY, SOILS, ETC.



Among the many side events at COP 28, the “4 per 1000” International Initiative organized, co-organized and participated in 10 side events in the Blue Zone between December 5th and 10th:

December 5th “World Soil Day”:

- **“Healthy Soils for Land and Climate”** at the UNCCD “Land and Drought” Pavilion - Co-organized by Ird, Comité Scientifique Français de la Désertification (CSFD), CIRAD and the International “4 per 1000” Initiative.
- **“The need for MRV [Monitoring, Reporting & Verification] Tools for policy makers, farmers, businesses and civil society, afin assessing value chains and reporting to consumers”** on the Save Soil Pavilion - Organized by the International “4 per 1000” Initiative.
- **“Soil carbon and opportunities for smallholders, maximizing community solutions and minimizing damage”** at the Sri Lanka Pavilion - Co-organized by LOAM, FIAN Sri Lanka and the International “4 per 1000” Initiative.
- **“Common Ground: Soil Health for Nature, People and Climate”** at the Food Systems Pavilion - Organized by CA4SH (Coalition for Action on Soil Health).
- **“How to help farmers contribute to climate change through the regeneration of soil health”** at the IICA Pavilion - Organized by the International “4 per 1000” Initiative.

December 8th

- **“Soil health: the strong link in sustainable development”** on the French Pavilion - Co-organized by Ird, CIRAD and the International “4 per 1000” Initiative.
- **“Facilitating access to the carbon market for farmers”** on the Save Soil Pavilion - Save Soil Organization and moderated by the International “4 per 1000” Initiative.
- **“Healthy soils: changing the game to meet food and climate objectives within planetary limits”** in a COP 28 meeting room - Co-organized by Ird, CIRAD and the International “4 per 1000” Initiative.
- **“Carbon storage in overseas agricultural and forest soils. State of knowledge, levers for action for French overseas territories and regional cooperation”** at the Francophonie Pavilion - Co-organized by Ird, CIRAD and the International “4 per 1000” Initiative.

December 10th

On the COP 28 “agriculture and water” theme day:

- **“Soil health: a key issue for combating climate change and improving agricultural productivity”** at the Pavilion Francophonie - Co-organized by Ird, CIRAD and the International “4 per 1000” Initiative.

The videos of these side events are available on the YouTube channel of the International “4 per 1000” Initiative. www.youtube.com

At the close of this 28th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, even if we can regret the sometimes too slow pace of international negotiations, we must nevertheless note the significant progress made on the subjects of interest to the International “4 per 1000” Initiative.

Soil health, sustainable agriculture, (agri-)food systems, soils, and their capacity to store carbon sustainably through appropriate agricultural practices have gained substantial and broad recognition as key elements in the fight against climate change.

It's up to us to continue this work, so that words become deeds in the very near future, and so that the work of millions of farmers, who far from meeting rooms and various lobbies, work daily to ensure our food security and contribute to the fight against climate change, desertification, and the erosion of biodiversity, is recognized and valued.

