

November 30, 2015

CSOs Call on Parties to Reject Net-Zero

We, as Civil Society Organizations, are supportive of efforts to reach a strong global climate agreement that will reduce emissions and limit the impacts of climate change. We believe a long-term mitigation goal is an important part of any global agreement, in conjunction with other key aspects such as urgent short-term action and means of implementation for developing countries. However, we are writing specifically to emphasize our **serious concerns with “net-zero emissions” and other similar language as a long-term global goal**. While the term “net-zero emissions” or even “carbon or climate neutral” may sound ambitious, both will in fact undermine ambition and also put food security and land rights at risk. **We urge you to reject “net” or “neutral” from any reference to a global goal in the Paris Agreement.**

With a limited global emissions budget if we are avoid runaway climate change, a global goal must drive immediate action that limits emissions within this budget. However **setting net-zero as the long-term goal would not require an immediate or ambitious emissions reduction pathway. Instead, “net” or “neutral” counting can allow business as usual emissions to continue** in the near-term, with the assumption that those emissions can be offset through the use of unproven, dangerous or nonexistent negative emissions technologies at some point in the future. This could lead to an “overshoot” of the emissions budget and a crossing of planetary tipping points, driving irreversible climate change and likely rendering the global goal unachievable.

The negative emissions technologies required for net-zero scenarios, such as large-scale bioenergy used in conjunction with geological storage (Bioenergy Carbon Capture and Storage – BECCS), and other large-scale land-based mitigation projects are considered technically, environmentally, economically and socially risky. Scaled up bioenergy or other land projects will increase demand and conflict for arable land, putting the land rights of smallholder farmers, indigenous peoples and forest depended people, food production and food security at risk. **The long-term goal in the Paris Agreement must not rely on unproven technologies that are not – and may never be – operational.**

A goal of net-zero emissions would also present a major threat to biodiversity, land rights and food security, particularly in developing countries. In recent years, the acquisition of approximately 17 million hectares of land for biofuel production has led to well-documented land grabs, food price spikes, hunger and social unrest. The scenarios in IPCC that assume **the use of BECCS indicate that between 500 million and 3 billion hectares of land (equivalent to the land mass of Africa) would be required.**¹ These scenarios are clearly unrealistic; however, even starting down this pathway would lead to enormous disruption for the very vulnerable communities that the climate deal should aims to protect.

In order to limit global temperature rise to less than 1.5 degrees of warming from pre-industrial levels, we need urgent action. A net-zero goal will not drive that urgency and will place food and land rights at risk. We urge you to reject “net,” “neutral,” or similar language in the long-term global goal, and pursue a goal that will drive needed action without undermining human rights.

ActionAid International

Action Contre la Faim International

Asian Peoples Movement on Debt and Development

ARA, Working Group on Rainforests and Biodiversity

¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change AR5, *Working III*, pg 446. Estimates in the IPCC actually go up to 6 billion hectares, but more scenarios are closer to 3 billion and that is therefore cited above.

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Corporate Europe Observatory
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Forests of the World
Friends of the Earth International
Friends of the Earth (EWNI)
Friends of the Earth Japan
Friends of the Earth Norway
Friends of the Earth US
Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
IFOAM- Organics International
LDC Watch
Pro Natura-Friends of the Earth Switzerland
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Rainforest Foundation - Norway
Secours Catholique - Caritas France
Spire, Utviklingsfondets ungdom
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