

## Less coordination and more action, please

After two weeks of United Nations COP 29 with an almost routine extension day to reach some sort of agreement, most of the participants have gone home disillusioned, among them our author. He would like to see somebody press the reset button – and much more investment in impact.

I am just back from COP 29 – my eighth United Nations Climate Change Conference. These annual climate events have enabled me to follow the growing interest in food and agriculture via official negotiations and things like special initiatives and side events. What's painfully clear, though, is that something isn't working. Negotiations have moved at a snail's pace, emissions from food systems continue to grow, and temperature increases are affecting farmers at the frontline.

### So what went wrong?

Here's my take on why developments have been so disappointing.

**First: coordination ad nauseum.** COP's endless schedules of meetings, its never-ending discussions, the proliferation of event documents that never get used – these are all indicators of bureaucracy triumphing over real action. Of course, a complex system involving thousands of stakeholders and nearly 200 countries require some kind of coordination. But I feel as though we have fallen into a doom loop where people are coordinating for the sake of coordination with no sense of direction.

As the Founder of a small NGO, I've been overwhelmed with requests for COP-related meetings, inputs, webinar participation and other activities. It's a vicious cycle that seems to deliver little. Coordination descended into farce this year, when host country Azerbaijan – together with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) – launched the Harmoniya Initiative. This aims to bring together – and I use words from their own press release – “disparate initiatives, coalitions, networks, and partnerships to empower farmers, villages and rural communities”. In other words, its mission is to coordinate the coordinators! That sounds like a doom loop to me. And it's a tacit admission that the proliferation of initiatives and programmes over the years is confusing, difficult to navigate and – most likely – ineffective, too.

**Second: the usual players.** If you take a closer look at who is doing all this coordi-

inating, it is usually a small group of the same organisations, namely FAO, the World Bank and the agricultural research network CGIAR, with some new or occasional entrants.

FAO is driving multiple initiatives, not just Harmoniya. For example, it is involved in the Food and Agriculture for Sustainable Transformation (FAST) partnership launched at COP 27, and the Agrifood Sharm El-Sheikh Support Programme – launched at COP 28. It also hosts the Food Systems Coordination Hub of the UN to coordinate the outcomes of the 2021 Food Systems Summit. And it created the Convergence Initiative – to help align national efforts on food systems transformation and climate action. This is coordination overload. I believe FAO – as the organisation responsible for technical advice – should be providing the support countries need anyway, rather than creating new coordination mechanisms every summit.

CGIAR coordinates the Agriculture Breakthrough initiative, which emerged from COP 26, and is also a partner in both the FAST Partnership and the Agrifood Sharm El-Sheikh Support Programme. Instead of providing the science needed to help inform key policy decisions on agriculture and food security, this simply channels CGIAR's valuable financial and human resources into what seems like never-ending coordination.

**Third: funders continuing to fund.** This endless coordination loop endures because funders continue to support it. For example, the FAST partnership of COP 27 is funded by Germany with a million euros. Germany also provided two million euros for the creation of the Climate Change Knowledge Hub, which seeks to provide UNFCCC decision-makers with a one-stop shop for knowledge on climate and agriculture, while the World Bank created the Climate Change Knowledge Portal with very similar objectives. Even with these two initiatives operational, the UNFCCC's official process for agriculture is now creating a new Sharm El Sheikh online portal, which aligns with other efforts including these two existing portals (I smell a job opportunity for a coordinator here!).



**Dhanush Dinesh** is the Chief Climate Catalyst of Clim-Eat, a think and do tank for food and climate which he founded at COP 26.

Photo: Clim-Eat

Another funder, the United Arab Emirates, funds the Agrifood Sharm El-Sheikh Support Programme, run by FAO to accelerate “coordinated efforts”, in collaboration with CGIAR and the World Bank. One might wonder why a programme whose main outcome at COP 29 is the agreement to develop an online portal should need a support programme with three reputed international organisations behind it.

The world desperately needs funding for action on climate and food, but if it just goes into more coordination, nothing will change.

### A new recipe

We need to rethink and reset. As we focus on tackling climate change and its effects on agriculture and food systems, let's not create any more coordination initiatives. We have enough. Actually, let's get rid of some.

Funders, please think twice before putting money into yet another initiative to drive coordination. We are drowning in coordination. Instead, invest in impact. Many of the key players in food and agriculture are already funded by you; make sure they deliver on climate goals as opposed to creating more things for them to do. What we really need is radical change in the UN agencies for food and agriculture and in CGIAR to take climate change as part of their core activities.

Finally, please think about the intended beneficiaries, from farmers to policy-makers, who are being coordinated from all directions on sorts of different things. How will they do their jobs with so much coordination noise?

So please, a little less coordination, and a lot more action. The coordination “ain't satisfying me” – or anyone else!

**Contact:** [dhanush@clim-eat.org](mailto:dhanush@clim-eat.org)