

Background paper:

Options for outcomes on the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture at COP26 and future work on agriculture under the UNFCCC

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October 2020

Disclaimer: This background paper was written as part of the REFOPLAN research project “Ambitious GHG mitigation in the agricultural sector: Analysis of sustainable potential in selected focus countries” (Ressortforschungsplan of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety Project No. 3720415040) supervised by the German Environment Agency. The responsibility for the content of this publication lies with the authors. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of the German Government.

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Summary

The agricultural sector has been integral to the multilateral climate change process since the beginning, with explicit references in the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol. Technical discussions on agriculture under SBSTA have taken place since 2012. With the adoption of the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture (KJWA) in 2017, the issue has seen renewed attention. In 2018 Parties agreed on a roadmap until COP26 that sets out a schedule for technical workshops, related workshop reports by the UNFCCC secretariat and submissions by Parties and observers. At COP26 the subsidiary bodies (SBI and SBSTA) are expected to report back to the COP on progress and outcomes of the KJWA and Parties will need to find agreement on the future of the KJWA. This background paper briefly outlines the history and state of play of the KJWA and explores options for the report back on outcomes of the KJWA and for a decision on the future of the KJWA at COP26.

Options for the report on progress and outcomes of the KJWA

So far, the SB conclusions are limited to welcoming workshop reports and generally referring to the issues discussed as well as welcoming submissions and inviting Parties to consider policies and plans that include the actions discussed at the workshops. Possible contents of a report back on progress and outcomes of the KJWA are:

- Reference to the workshops and acknowledging the workshop reports
- Reference to contents of the workshop reports such as insights and recommendations on technical aspects.
- Content related to future work, which could address methodological issues or establish general tasks.
- Recommendations and calls to actions, with a view of enhancing implementation and ambition.

Given the significant amount of information that will be contained in the six workshop reports, producing a comprehensive and balanced report back that accommodates different views and priorities will be very challenging.

Options for the future of the KJWA

The mandate given at COP23 is not explicit on the future of the KJWA. Whether the KJWA will be concluded after the report back on progress and outcomes or continues, is thus a matter of interpretation. In case of continued work, precedent indicates that Parties would need to agree on a new mandate and capture it in a COP decision. A COP decision would be required if:

- Parties change the modalities of the KJWA.
- Parties decide to continue the KJWA with current modalities, following practice that the COP previously decided on the issues to be addressed in the KJWA.
- A mandate is given to the Constituted Bodies (SBI 2019) or another Convention Body.

Four possible endpoints for the discussions on the future of the KJWA are identified:

A: Parties agree to continue the KJWA with existing modalities and agree on a COP decision establishing new workshop topics.

B: Parties agree to continue work on agriculture under the COP and change the modalities of the KJWA. For example, a mandate could be given to the Constituted Bodies or the Secretariat.

C: Parties decide not to continue work on agriculture under the COP and for example invite the CMA to continue.

D: Parties agree to conclude the agenda item on work on agriculture without any follow-up work.

For each of these options Parties will need to agree on specifics, such as the recipient of the mandate, modalities, and timing as well as the thematic focus. Most importantly however, they will need to define the objective of any future work on agriculture under the UNFCCC.

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1 Agriculture in the UNFCCC negotiations

The agricultural sector has been integral to the multilateral climate change process since the beginning. Agriculture is mentioned in Article 4 of the Convention for which Parties shall “control, reduce or prevent” anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases and “cooperate in preparing for adaptation to the impacts of climate change” that includes planning for agriculture. Additionally, food security is included in the objective of the Convention. Agriculture is also mentioned in article 2 of the Kyoto Protocol, with the obligation for Annex I Parties to implement and/or elaborate policies on the “promotion of sustainable forms of agriculture in light of climate change considerations” and article 10, which requires all Parties to formulate programmes containing mitigation and adaptation measures. However, it is only with the last-minute inclusion of agriculture in the outcome of the Ad hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action (decision 2/CP.17), which was preceded by lengthy discussions itself, that Parties agreed to begin technical discussion on agriculture. One stumbling block to the discussions on agriculture under the UNFCCC after that point, was that the mandate, given by the COP to treat this specific sector, lacked any context on differentiation and whether to treat it as a mitigation, adaptation or finance issue. Consequently, lengthy discussions ensued over the focus of the discussions and issues of finance and equity. As with many other issues under the UNFCCC, agriculture discussions are politically sensitive. They are intrinsically related with food security, which has been dealt with in the UN system long before the UNFCCC and thus created a potential for duplication of work. Also, the economic relevance of the sector and its role in the greenhouse gas-emissions profile is very different among countries. Agriculture generally plays a larger role in the economies and emission profiles of developing countries, which also identify urgent adaptation needs. Given the lack of context on differentiation in decision 2/CP.17, in the follow-up negotiations developing countries have been adamant in that, if the way forward was to include all countries, discussions could only focus on adaptation.

Six years after the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) was given the mandate to consider issues related to agriculture, the adoption of the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture (KJWA) in 2017 was seen by many stakeholders as a success, elevating the issue of agriculture at the technical and political level. By providing a visible and clearly named space to address the agricultural sector within the UNFCCC, the KJWA has allowed Parties to comprehensively discuss agriculture in the context of climate change from the perspectives of mitigation, adaptation, and support needed for implementation. Albeit, differences among Parties remain on which issues need to be prioritized and the word mitigation does not appear in the KJWA decision or any of the conclusions of the Subsidiary Bodies (SBs) on the KJWA.

2 Short overview of the KJWA

The KJWA was initiated through decision 4/CP.23 in 2017. It gives a mandate to the SBI and SBSTA to “jointly address issues related to agriculture, including through workshops and expert meetings, working with constituted bodies under the Convention and taking into consideration the vulnerabilities of agriculture to climate change and approaches to addressing food security”. The KJWA is the conclusion of the mandate given to the SBSTA in decision 2/CP.17¹, to consider issues related to agriculture “with the aim of exchanging views and the Conference of the Parties adopting a decision on this matter”. The KJWA does not include clearly stated objectives but implicitly, it is

¹ Outcome of the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action, 2011

expected to improve the implementation of climate action in the agricultural sector through promoting and exchanging views on technological solutions and/or mobilizing or enhancing financial support.

Under the above-mentioned mandate, between 2013 and 2017 the SBSTA² conducted five in session workshops on issues related to agriculture that dealt with:

- “The current state of scientific knowledge on how to enhance the adaptation of agriculture to climate change impacts” (SBSTA 39, Nov 2013);
- “Early warning systems and contingency plans in relation to extreme weather events” (SBSTA 42, June 2015);
- “Assessment of risk and vulnerability of agricultural systems to different climate change scenarios at regional, national and local levels” (SBSTA 42, June 2015);
- “Identification and assessment of agricultural practices and technologies to enhance productivity in a sustainable manner, food security and resilience, considering the differences in agro-ecological zones and farming systems, such as different grassland and cropland practices and systems” (SBSTA 44, May 2016);
- “Identification of adaptation measures, taking into account the diversity of the agricultural systems, indigenous knowledge systems and the differences in scale” (SBSTA 44, May 2016).

The decision outlining the KJWA requested Parties to submit their views on elements to be included in the work and mentioned six specific elements:

- a) “Modalities for implementation of the outcomes of the five in session workshops on issues related to agriculture and other future topics that may arise from this work”;
- b) “Methods and approaches for assessing adaptation, adaptation co-benefits and resilience”;
- c) “Improved soil carbon, soil health and soil fertility under grassland and croplands as well as integrated systems including water management”;
- d) “Improved nutrient use and manure management towards sustainable and resilient agricultural systems”;
- e) “Improved livestock management systems”;
- f) “Socioeconomic and food security dimensions of climate change in the agricultural sector”.

The COP requested a report back from the SBs on progress and outcomes of the work by its 26th session.

At the following session of the SBs in 2018, Parties agreed on a roadmap for the KJWA until COP26. This roadmap basically consisted of a schedule for submissions by Parties and observers, in session workshops on the elements mentioned above, as well as for the preparation of reports on the workshop by the secretariat and consideration of these reports at the following session. Parties were also invited to submit their views on “future topics” by 28 September 2020.

² Information on SBSTA work on agriculture can be found here <https://unfccc.int/topics/land-use/workstreams/agriculture>

2.1 Potential and limitations of the KJWA

During the information event that took place as part of the June Momentum³ participants indicated that the KJWA has served as an important platform to exchange knowledge and enhance understanding of issues related to agriculture, foster cooperation, catalyse initiatives and raise awareness of the challenges and opportunities surrounding climate action in the agricultural sector.

So far, the KJWA has been successful in raising awareness around the important role of mitigation and adaptation in the agricultural sector, especially in relation to food security and food systems in the context of climate change. Through exchanges during the workshops, Constituted Bodies of the UNFCCC and the financial institutions have been made aware of many relevant issues in the sector and the focused process within the KJWA has helped to galvanize engagement of civil society and observer organizations. The KJWA has also provided the opportunity for focused exchange between financial institutions and Parties on how to access finance for action in the agricultural sector, which has the potential to improve climate finance towards the sector. The KJWA has also provided the opportunity for technical exchange and capacity building (UNFCCC 2020).

However, critical voices have also highlighted difficulties related to the KJWA. From the perspective of maintaining a manageable UNFCCC process it has been questioned whether addressing the agricultural sector warrants a standalone agenda item. Constituted Bodies generally do not have mandates to address specific sectors. Also, the potential for the KJWA alone to foster concrete climate action in the agricultural sector is limited. Firstly, developing meaningful recommendations for action is challenging in the multilateral context. Secondly, the impact of the KJWA will always depend on how the knowledge generated by means of the KJWA is carried on to relevant national stakeholders with the competence to take up the insights and recommendations for shaping policies that influence farmers' practices. Another limitation is that the KJWA does not have any means to increase the available resources for implementation of actions in the sector (SBI 2020).

3 State of play of the KJWA

As of September 2020, four of the mandated in session workshops have taken place (a to d) and the remaining workshops have been postponed due to the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic.⁴ An additional intersessional workshop with the focus on sustainable land and water management and strategies and modalities to scale up implementation of best practices to increase resilience and sustainable production was agreed in June 2019. It was supposed to take place in the first half of 2020, financially supported by the governments of New Zealand and Ireland as well as the FAO but was also postponed due to the pandemic. As requested, the Secretariat has produced reports for the four completed workshops. During informal discussions at past sessions, Parties have tried to engage on the substance of these reports with a view of including substantive elements, such as recommendations on the outcomes of the KJWA. Also, in informal consultations at COP25, some developing country Parties indicated that they want to see a permanent mechanism to continue work under the KJWA (IISD Reporting Services 2019a). African countries and LDCs have expressed the view that the KJWA is to help deliver dedicated financial resources for agriculture through the financial mechanism and/or recommendations for financial institutions.⁵ Their thematic priorities are

³ The virtual open event was organized by the UNFCCC Secretariat and took place on June 8. The broadcast is available at <https://unfccc.int/event/koronivia-joint-work-on-agriculture-information-event>.

⁴ As of 1 October 2020, specific dates for the workshops are not known.

⁵ [Submission of Egypt on behalf of the African Group \(2018\)](#)

adaptation, resilience, and food security. They have expressed strong support for strengthening the KJWA. Latin American countries have also expressed their support for the continuation of the KJWA. Their thematic priorities lay in adaptation and resilience. With regards to mitigation in the agricultural sector, this is considered through the lens of securing food production and food security⁶. The EU, New Zealand, and Norway prefer a focus on the aspects of technical exchange that lead to better implementation of mitigation and adaptation actions as well as improvement of methods for measuring progress.⁷

4 Future of the KJWA

4.1 Options for the KJWA at COP26 and implications on future work on agriculture under the UNFCCC

Two distinct issues stand for consideration at COP26:

- the report by the SBs to the COP on progress and outcomes of the KJWA and
- finding agreement on how to proceed with or if to conclude with the KJWA.

In the following paragraphs, the two issues are considered separately, although they have been and will be dealt with jointly during the negotiations and will be captured in one set of conclusions by the SBs. There is an overlap between the two issues on the matter of future areas of work. If Parties agree to capture future areas of work in the report to the COP, this can be considered an outcome of the KJWA and at the same time be part of an agreement on the future of KJWA.

Options for the report back on progress and outcomes of the KJWA

Parties have already discussed the report back to the COP during informal consultations in past sessions but not explicitly captured progress (IISD Reporting Services 2019b). The SB conclusions welcome the workshop reports prepared by the Secretariat and refer to some specific issues discussed there. For example, on topic a) (modalities for implementation), Parties agreed to recognize that mapping of activities and constituted bodies by the KJWA as well as the involvement of constituted bodies and financial institutions is relevant⁸. On topic b) (assessing adaptation, adaptation co-benefits and resilience), Parties recognized existing monitoring tools for adaptation and its co-benefits⁹ but also state that tools could be adjusted and new tools could be developed¹⁰. On topic 2 c) (soil and water management), Parties reiterated the importance of the issues and their potential to contribute to food security, adaptation and enhancing carbon sinks. Carbon sinks were not mentioned in the KJWA decision. SBI and SBISTA also issued invitations to Parties to consider policies and plans that include the generally mentioned actions. **The controversial issue is whether the report back on the KJWA will capture substantive outcomes, i.e. in form of concrete recommendations for action or guidance on issues, building on the technical exchange of the workshops or limit itself to procedural contents.** The issues already included in SB

⁶ [See for example submission by Uruguay \(2018\)](#)

⁷ [See for example submission by Norway \(2020\)](#)

⁸ SB conclusions on work of the KJWA: FCCC/SB/2019/L.2 (SB50)

⁹ One co-benefit of adaptation is mitigation.

¹⁰ SB conclusions on work of the KJWA: FCCC/SB/2019/L.5 (SB51)

conclusions give an indication on where a possible landing ground on substantive issues could be, since Parties have already agreed to them and could build on from that point.

Considering public expectations and that the mandate to the SBs is to report back to the COP on its 26th session, there is certain pressure on Parties to find agreement on the report of the SBs to the COP. The COP26 Presidency may also be willing to dedicate specific diplomatic efforts to this agenda item given the UK government's involvement in the Just Rural Transition initiative (Pinfield 2020).

Possible contents of the report on progress and outcomes of the KJWA are:

- Reference to the workshops and the workshop reports as well as appreciation of the contributions of involved stakeholders. This is an uncontroversial element since it would refer to work already undertaken.
- Reference to **contents of the workshop reports** such as insights and recommendations on technical aspects which could be considered outcomes of the KJWA. This would require more deliberation among Parties because of the number of issues addressed in the workshops and because different political priorities would come to play when selecting the issues.
- Contents related to future work. Parties could build on “the way forward” sections of the workshop report and submissions on “future topics not listed in decision 4/CP.23 and views on the progress” of the KJWA, which were due on 28 September 2020.¹¹ Future work could touch upon:
 - **methodological issues**, for example developing indicators and metrics for measuring adaptation, development of quantified baselines for soil carbon, MRV of nutrient use and manure management or;
 - **general topics and tasks** such as identification of guidance for implementation, exploration of needs and knowledge gaps, and exchange of knowledge between developed and developing country Parties, performing a regular appraisal of work on agriculture across the UNFCCC bodies and its financial mechanism.
- **Recommendations and call to actions**, with a view of enhancing implementation and ambition. These could address Parties or the UNFCCC bodies and mechanisms. Some proposals include a call for inclusion of agricultural action in NDCs and national plans as well as recommendations on best practices in the areas addressed by the KJWA, policy guidelines, and safeguards (FAO 2018). A difficult issue to resolve will be how to address requests for enhanced or focused support for agriculture, especially adaptation.

Given the significant amount of information that will be contained in the six workshop reports, producing a comprehensive and balanced report back that accommodates different views and priorities will be very challenging. It is also important to note, that the wording “report back” does not specify the shape or format of the report. Taken literally, it could be in the shape of a document that summarizes contents of all previous reports, issues recommendations and would be prepared by the Secretariat. But it could also be an oral report by the chairs of the SBs to the COP, which would

¹¹ As of 01 October 2020, no submissions by Parties have been made. Presumably because of the Sars-CoV2 pandemic and the delays in the roadmap.

be captured in the report of the session. Or it could be that Parties agree on SB conclusions, that may or may not include a recommendation for a COP decision, as their report back.

Options for the future of the KJWA

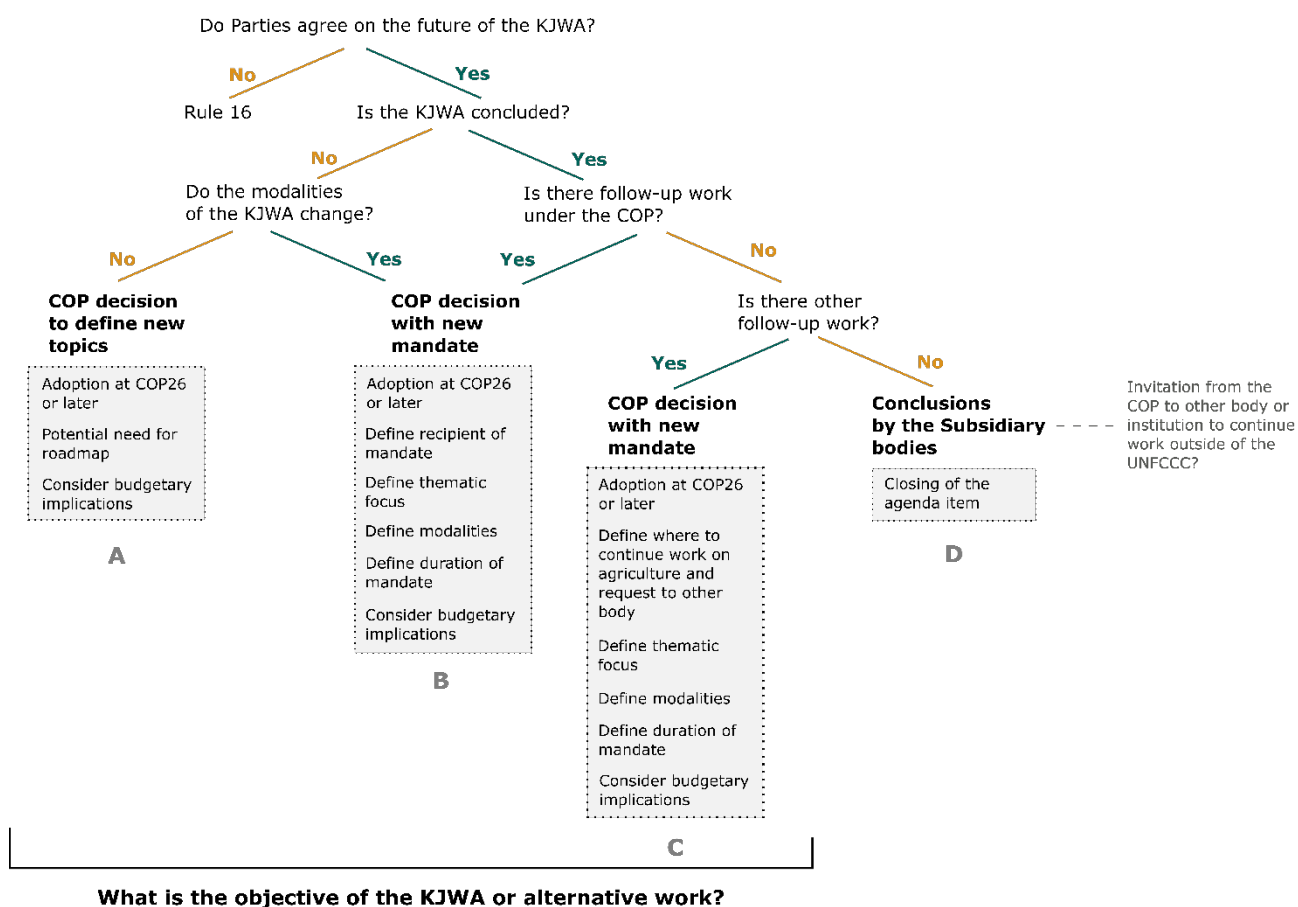
The mandate given at COP23 is not explicit on the future of the KJWA. Whether the KJWA will be concluded after the report on progress and outcomes or continues, is thus a matter of interpretation. However, several Parties have expressed interest in continuing work on agriculture in the UNFCCC and the request for submissions on future topics and progress with the adoption of the KJWA indicates that this was an option from the beginning. In case Parties want to continue constructive and substantive work on agriculture, precedent indicates that they would need to agree on a new mandate and capture it in a COP decision. A COP decision would be required if:

- Parties change the modalities of the KJWA.
- Parties decide to continue the KJWA with current modalities, following practice that the COP previously decided on the issues to be addressed in the KJWA.¹²
- A mandate is given to the Constituted Bodies (SBI 2019) or another Convention Body.

Figure 4-1 gives an overview of the issues Parties need to agree on regarding the future of the KJWA. The depicted decision tree is not intended as a roadmap for discussions, but as an overview for orientation. In practice, discussions that could lead to either one of the end points take place in parallel, although some may be more politically viable than others. Despite expectations, Parties may not manage to agree on all points of a draft decision for recommendation to COP26. The SBs could thus report back to COP26, capture progress on the discussions on the future of the KJWA and agree to continue consideration of the issue at their next session. If no consensus is found or if a minority of Parties or even one Party decided to block an agreement, current rules of procedure of the UNFCCC (rule 16) indicate that the agenda item is automatically taken up at the next session and this could be perpetuated indefinitely. This outcome would likely hamper substantive discussions in the near future and result in lengthy procedural discussions, without any results besides keeping the agenda item open. The following paragraphs briefly outline the identified options. The option to continue work on mitigation and adaptation in the agricultural sector outside of the UNFCCC is not further discussed here but will be dealt with in a separate paper.

¹² However, some may argue, that the topics of the previous five workshops were initially defined only by the SBSTA and there is no need for a COP decision to continue the KJWA since there is also no mandate for its closure. Also, at their 50th session, the SBs asked the secretariat to organize an additional intersessional workshop, which could be interpreted as that the KJWA could continue without a new COP decision.

Figure 4-1: Issues to be addressed to determine the future of the KJWA under the UNFCCC



Source: Öko-Institut e.V.

Option A: If Parties agree to continue the KJWA without changes, they only need to agree on specifying the issues for consideration in the next sessions. Under this scenario the KJWA would mainly remain a forum for technical exchange. Some Parties may question the usefulness of this kind of work and others may consider it inadequate to address issues of support. Without further specifying the objectives and outcomes of the KJWA this option may not deliver much value added to agriculture discussions under the UNFCCC.

Option B: If Parties agree to continue work on agriculture under the COP, they may also decide to change the modalities and move away from the workshop-only based approach. Some options mentioned in the discussions to complement or replace workshops include:

- Conferring a task to one or more constituted bodies, for example to better coordinate their work on agriculture.
- Establishing a permanent mechanism to address agriculture, this could be aligned with the forum on implementation of response measures.

- Establishing a web-platform to serve as a repository for information¹³.
- Include agriculture in other ongoing processes, such as the forum on the implementation of response measures and its work on a just transition of the work force.

Parties may also agree to change modalities in terms of how frequently they undertake work or introduce a review component to work undertaken. Again, the underlying question for defining the way forward is the objective of this work. Several Parties have stated that the objective should be to improve implementation; others see the objective in mobilizing support. Technical work as undertaken under the KJWA so far, may not be the most effective format to fulfill either of these objectives. Other options, such as a more focused work by the constituted bodies¹⁴ could deliver more concrete results that help Parties with developing policies in the agricultural sector. The KJWA has shown the added value of facilitating exchange between all relevant stakeholders and addressing specific technical issues where Parties can learn from each other. Any new modalities should be designed to support these two functions.

Option C: If Parties decide not to continue work under the COP the two alternatives related to the UNFCCC that seem viable at this point are:

- Continue **work under the CMA**, for which the COP would need to invite the CMA to continue this task. Any future work on modalities and focus of work would be decided by the CMA. Placing the issue of agriculture under the authority of the CMA may be the most suitable option for promoting the implementation of action in the sector because it would facilitate dealing with agriculture in the context of the Paris Agreement, namely regarding NDCs, transparency and the global stocktake. 113 NDCs include a mention of action in the agricultural sector, with mitigation targets ranging from quantified reductions to specific actions (DIE 2020; Crumpler et al. 2019). As the Governing Body of the Paris Agreement, the CMA is the logical authority for guiding work on agriculture in the context of NDCs. However, countries that have not ratified the Paris Agreement or have withdrawn from it would be excluded from decision making on future work on agriculture. Therefore, there may be some resistance against pursuing this option. Also, unless CMA 3 takes up the issue in parallel with the invitation by COP26, Parties that want to continue work on agriculture would not have the certainty that this would be the case under the CMA. At the following session, the CMA would start its own discussion on whether to consider agriculture and the issue could be halted there. Just one example of an issue the CMA could disagree on is whether the SBI and SBSTA should continue to work jointly on technical issues and recommendations or a mandate is given to only one of the subsidiary bodies. Whether placing only the agricultural sector as a standalone issue under the authority of the CMA is coherent with the implementation of the Paris Agreement would warrant further assessment.
- Continue work under the **Global Climate Action Agenda (GCAA)**. This option would have a clear focus on implementation, potentially increase the involvement of non-Party stakeholders with the issue and provide for opportunities that motivate high level political engagement. But some Parties may consider it inadequate to stop considering agriculture under the formal UNFCCC process and placing it under the GCAA which is only indirectly linked to the process

¹³ FAO is working on a platform for knowledge provision and sharing called Land-CC hub. It conducted public consultations on it in 2018.

¹⁴ The constituted bodies that have participated in the KJWA so far include the Adaptation Committee, the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage, the Advisory Board of the Climate Technology Centre and Network, Consultative Group of Experts, Paris Committee on Capacity-building, the Least Developed Countries Expert Group, the Standing Committee on Finance as well as representatives from the GEF and GCF.

and guided by the work of the High-Level Champions¹⁵. The GCAA does not take decisions and participation is voluntary. It operates based on initiatives and partnerships. It is a means to strengthen civil society and business engagement in climate action and progress is captured in a yearbook prepared under the authority of the Champions and the NAZCA Portal¹⁶. Parties have so far decided to continue with the GCAA until 2025 (United Nations Climate Change 2020). This option could be combined with a closure of the agenda item or a referral to the year 2025, when agriculture could be taken up again by the COP taking into account any decision on the future of GCAA.

Option D: Closing the agenda item without any follow-up work is an option but it is not prominent in the discussion and there is very small likelihood that there will be consensus around this option. In effect this means, that any Party disagreeing with a closure of the agenda item could force it to remain open through application of rule 16. Reasons to pursue this option may be procedural or budgetary and some Parties may consider that other processes and fora outside of the UNFCCC are more suited for promoting climate action in the agricultural sector¹⁷.

Two sessions of the SBs remain, for Parties to find agreement. Whether they manage to do so will depend on several factors, including how much time they get in the negotiation sessions, how much informal or diplomatic work is undertaken until the session, the priorities of the COP26 presidency, the up-dated or new NDCs presented by Parties and even the wider global context. Following years of droughts and floods in many countries, the public spotlight may be more focused on the relationship between agriculture and climate change and thus provide momentum to the discussions under the UNFCCC.

¹⁵ As per decision 1/CP.21 High-level Champions are appointed by the COP President. They have the task to strengthen high level engagement and help strengthening voluntary efforts. Each champion is appointed for two years.

¹⁶ Access to the NAZCA portal <https://climateaction.unfccc.int/>

¹⁷ This paper does not explore options for continuing the KJWA outside of the UNFCCC. If Parties decide to continue work on agriculture and climate change outside of the UNFCCC they may decide to drop the Koronivia label or decide to continue using it for its recognition value.

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