

WORLD BANK CONSULTATIVE MEETING ABOUT A GLOBAL AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT DUBLIN 6 - 8 NOVEMBER, 2002

VIEWS FROM INTERNATIONAL CSOs PARTICIPATING IN THE DUBLIN MEETING¹

WHAT?

From 6 - 8 November 2002 in Dublin, the World Bank, with support from the Irish Department of Agriculture and Food, convened the first meeting of a global consultative process to determine the need for and possible scope of a proposed international assessment of the role of agricultural science and technology in reducing hunger, improving rural livelihoods and stimulating economic growth over the coming decades. Management of the process within the World Bank has been given to Robert Watson, World Bank Chief Scientist, credited with the achievements, among others, of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Additional co-chairs are Louise Fresco (ADG, Agriculture, FAO), Rita Sharma (Govt. of India), Claudia Martinez Zuleta (Govt. of Colombia) and Sefu Ketema (ASARECA, Ethiopia)².

The reasons for this process presented by the co-chairs are that *"the global community confronts an enormous challenge: stimulating economic growth in rural areas where 75% of the very poor currently reside, and ensuring the nutritional security of a world population that is growing in size and evolving in consumption patterns, without intensifying environmental degradation, social inequity or adverse consequences for human health."*

Watson and the co-chairs proposed an 8 month consultation process about the need and design of such an assessment, which would be followed by the assessment itself from the end of 2003 up to the beginning 2006. The consultation would be conducted in a series of regional meetings, electronic fora and video-conferences, steered by a committee of 40, which should represent all interested parties and guarantee the openness and inclusivity of the process as well as make final recommendations regarding the scope and organisation of the assessment itself.

WHO?

Nearly 100 people attended. They came predominantly from UN organisations, World Bank and CGIAR, national governments and agencies, research organisations and parastatal organisations, both North and South. Less than 10 were from international CSOs - environment, development and consumer. Few participants came from southern civil society. No smallholder farmers' organisations, pastoralists or fisherfolk were represented. International agro-chemical corporations dominated the few private sector participants.

THE MEETING

The meeting was structured into plenary sessions chaired by Bob Watson and 4 breakout groups, chaired by the other co-chairs. These focused on *'Key questions and scope of the assessment'* and *'Organisational options for the assessment'* and *regional discussions*. The discussion focussed on the proposed initial consultative process over the next 6 to 8 months to determine the scope, governance and organisation of the proposed full assessment.

Repeatedly, CSO interventions were made that emphasised:

- the need to consider all knowledge systems and science views (including farmer-driven science) and technologies for agriculture, and its relationship to food sovereignty;
- that the consultations should be structured and driven by the needs and demands of agricultural producers and consumers in developing countries, not the interests of global science and technology providers

¹ Action Aid, Consumers International, Consumers Union (representing Pesticide Action Network North America), Greenpeace, International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), ITDG (Intermediate Technology Development Group), Oxfam America

² The Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) is a non-political organisation of the National Agricultural Research Institutes (NARIs) of ten countries

- to include, deliberately, the views of the poor producers themselves - the marginal smallholder farmers, pastoralists and fisherfolk and to design appropriate forms of their participation to this end
- to include a critical retrospective view of the contribution of science and technology to the present state of food, agriculture and agroecosystems.
- to focus not just on short-term technological options but also on a longer term view of how 'science and technology' could make a positive contribution to the livelihoods of the very poor in particular and all food producers in general, and maximise, maintain or restore agroecosystem functions to support their production systems and for the public good;
- that the composition of the Steering Committee must be more representative of Civil Society and social movements, producers and all realms of the private sector
- that there must not be a hidden agenda to sell specific technologies, especially genetic engineering, under the pretext of such an inclusive and broad assessment

Many stakeholders, including CSOs as well as industry, were probably ambiguous about whether the whole initiative had a chance to be taken further, which will also depend on appropriate funding and institutional commitments and if so whether it would or would not be useful for their respective causes.

There was little mention of any specific technologies with the notable exception of "biotechnology", which many were anxious to point out should not be at the focus and not form the "hidden agenda" of the exercise. However, agroecosystem approaches and agroecological systems were mentioned by many

OUTCOME

No consensus was reached nor formal decisions and commitments made by the participants as a whole. Ian Johnson on behalf of the World Bank, however, in the final plenary committed to initiate and specify the regional consultative process. The Bank undertook to make this an open process that would consider all technologies, knowledge systems and science views, be deliberately inclusive of all key groups in all regions including resource-poor farmers, herders and fisherfolk, and with no preconception of what technology outcomes are desired. The assessment will take a long view, building on an historical assessment of the contribution of science and technology to the current state of food and agriculture in the world. Johnson summarised that he had heard two overwhelming themes coming out of the meeting, one on process and one on substance of the issues.

- First, if there is any suggestion that the process is not totally open and inclusive then the CSOs would have every right to walk away from the process.
- Secondly, the assessment must focus on agriculture and agroecosystems writ large, i.e. an agro-ecological perspective that includes the whole value chain and includes environmental and social responsibility especially to small farmers, herders and fisherfolk in the South.

The initial Consultative Process over the next 8 months would be overseen by a Steering Committee of about 40+ people including, at least, the Co-chairs (5), Governments (12), Private sector entities (4), Foundations (2 observers), Non-governmental organisations (4), Consumer and farmer organisations (2+4), at-large scientists (2), Scientific institutions (4), International agencies (4), UN conventions (2). It was noted that the composition should also reflect an appropriate balance between genders and regions and within the different groups (notably the entire food chain within the private sector), some of which may want to form additional, broader reference groups.

A proposal for the committee's exact composition and numbers (indicated in brackets) will be presented by the co-chairs, who will also lay down their conclusions from the Dublin meeting and make a more detailed proposal for the regional consultations.

As to the desirable scope and questions for the assessment, there were no clear agreements and conclusions drawn as this would be up to the consultative process itself. This helped to ease the different approaches of participants at this point in the process. Many emphasised the need to

interlink and combine this initiative with other ongoing international and regional discussions on a similar subject. Regarding the appropriate organisation and governance of the assessment itself, probably a majority of participants would aim at a formal intergovernmental structure with strong participation by all interested parties.

The overall impression is that the majority of participants cautiously welcomed the initiative and were supportive of its further development, while not many crucial details were actually resolved. It will be up to the initial organisers to draw conclusions and take the right steps to get the project going and find sufficient initial funding and support.

CONDITIONAL CSO CONCLUSIONS

At this point of the discussion we conclude:

1. It will be up to each individual and organisation to judge whether participation in the consultative process is seen to be important and promising for the promotion of their goals, what priority this could have in their work and what conditions would have to be met to this end.
2. The discussions held in Dublin do suggest that the organisers intentions are sincere and open and that there is a commitment especially to include all those which have not been present or underrepresented at this initial meeting.
3. The different participants of this meeting obviously have their own agendas, interests and motivations regarding Science and Technology and the fight against poverty and hunger. These interests are diverse and in many ways are also incompatible. It would be naïve to suggest that these interests will not influence the setting, inclusiveness and future path of both the consultations now proceeding and the assessment, which might be conducted as a result.
4. Whether the assessment will provide a fair and promising opportunity for all interested parties to contribute will ultimately depend on whether the right questions will be asked and on the way answers to these questions will be sought, discussed and validated. That in turn will strongly depend on who participates in this consultation process and who will draw the conclusions from it
5. The next milestones of the consultative process will be
 - a. the setting up and the composition of a steering committee that has a fair and inclusive representation of all interested parties
 - b. the setting up and agenda of the regional meetings, conferences and fora
 - c. the fair and adequate facilitation of participation in the consultations by all relevant interested parties. This will require resourcing to correct for the unfair and unequal distribution of financial and human resources available to the different interested groups

If the process is as open as described, environment and development organisations would consider engaging with the initial consultative process, otherwise not. An initial indicator will be the report of the meeting and the proposed composition of the Steering Committee as well as the design and sponsorship of the regional consultations.

Only if adequate conditions are met and we believe it will lead towards an outcome that would indeed serve the priorities for equity and justice of the majority of food producers - smallholder farmers, pastoralists and fisherfolk - would we continue to participate further in this proposed assessment process. The international CSOs present are keen to discuss their approach further with other interested CSOs and social movements.

20 November 2002