

EUROPEAN ACTION ON GLOBAL LIFE SCIENCES (EAGLES)

PROCEEDINGS OF THE EAGLES FOOD FORUM CONSULTATIVE MEETING

BARCELONA, SPAIN

18 – 20 September 2007

In association with the 13th European Congress on Biotechnology

The EAGLES conference focused on the European response through research to the global challenges posed by food security, quality and safety, and sustainable agriculture in the developing and emerging countries (DECs). It addressed the political, ethical and global issues posed by food and sustainable agriculture in the DECs. And it discussed and made recommendations on how Europe might best develop a strategic policy and research agenda for international cooperation in science and technology with the DECs in food, agriculture and life sciences.

The Food Forum Consultative Meeting is one in a series of meeting being held as part of the Specific Support Action "European Action in Global Life Sciences – Food Forum" funded by the EU under the 6th Framework Programme for Research.

Following is a summary of the main conclusions:

1. Agriculture and agricultural productivity are key to alleviating hunger and small holder farmers have a critical role to play. Suggestion that they be declared a protected "red book" species!
2. The downturn in importance of Agriculture generally in many countries has lead to decreased expenditure on agriculture and a decreasing share of national budgets including Overseas Development Aid (ODA) budgets.
3. But Agriculture and Agricultural Research are back on the ODA agenda
4. Half of the world's poor live in countries with the capacity to solve their own problems. Need to prioritize the other half for foreign investment and internal investment in agricultural research
5. The shift from public to private company funding of research relevant to food and agriculture has lessened the likelihood of technology transfer from developed to developing countries as a "public good"
6. Technology transfer from developing countries should lead to self sufficiency not dependency
7. The distinction between North and South Agricultural Research is becoming less and less relevant
8. European food research was very relevant to DECs. Food quality was also very relevant to DECs and not just quantity issues
9. Capacity building should primarily be a national responsibility
10. Capacity building in research was considered particularly important because of its strategic importance
11. The question was posed as to if and how poor countries should be aided in developing National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS). No consensus emerged in answer to this question.
12. DECs are very different in terms of needs.
13. The importance of the role of mentoring and partnering in the case of the least developed countries was stressed and it was suggested that individual developed countries should adopt a country for partnering and mentoring
14. It was suggested that the substantial European spend on ARD could be used much more effectively and ways to achieve this needed to be urgently considered.
15. There was a need for better coordination across EU countries on ARD and for better knowledge on what was being done in each country. The ERA-ARD project was encouraged to prioritize this area.

16. The view was expressed that the focus of Development Aid should be projects rather than institutions
17. Biotechnology was considered to potentially have a very important role in achieving greater food security, as evidenced by the New Green Revolution in India, China and Argentina
18. The Food versus Fuel debate was considered critical.
19. There was a need to refocus the CGIAR system. It should go "back to fundamentals". It suffers from a lack of continuity related to too much project funding and too little core funding. It needs to get back to doing more basic longer term research that individual countries cannot do. It is not just another development agency. It has a specific research function.
20. The importance of Horticulture was stressed and the need for research and development in this area.
21. Need to take account of culture and cultural differences and anthropology in solving problems.
22. The importance of empowering women and educating young girls
23. Causes of hunger are complex as are solutions. Contrast the situation in China and India with that in Africa. Why did the Green Revolution work in some places but not in others? Suggestion that Land Reform and Land Tenure issues played a role.
24. The view was expressed that Africa itself can solve its problems.(Leave us alone!) African leaders must bring Africa forward – by providing leadership and administrative capacity
25. Progress must come from inside a society not outside it
26. Consumers are key stakeholders and NGOs and academia have a role in determining and highlighting consumer needs
27. The importance of learning from failures as well as successes
28. The constraints to solving the problem of food security are more political than technical. Challenges and solutions focus more in the Strategic/Policy arena. But research also has a place.

The "ten commandments" for global agriculture

1. **Reform Policies and Markets** to achieve fair trade globally, remove distortion of farm subsidies, remove urban bias, improve access to markets and reduce post harvest losses
2. **Focus on the Smallholder Farmer** as they are the majority of all farmers, are disproportionately poor, most affected by globalization, suffer from low world prices for agriculture, climate change and HIV/AIDS and have no political voice
3. **Harvest Natural Resources** as agriculture is the major interface between people and nature, sustainable development benefits all, water is a scarce resource and reducing pollution is essential
4. **Raise Agricultural Productivity** measured in terms of Total Factor Productivity. Productivity must rise faster than prices fall to allow an increasing margin for smallholders. Technology has an important role
5. **Improve Nutritional Content** to give health benefit from better nutrition; edible vaccines are a possibility
6. **Address Short Term Vulnerability** as most farmers live precariously and climate change is increasing vulnerability
7. **Empower Women** as this has been shown to increase productivity, improve infant mortality, school enrolment and child morbidity. Need to educate girls.
8. **Reach out to the Ultra Poor** as market incentives do not work for them, trickle down does not work and special programmes are needed.
9. **Support Science** as more support is needed in developing countries and not just technology but also human resources, institutions of excellence,

financing mechanisms, Public/Private interfaces and attention to Science and Society issues.

10. **Translate Rhetoric into Action** but Rhetoric, Declarations, Plans and Targets do not equate to action. Many past declaration and many Government announcements have yielded little. Will it be different with the Millennium Development Goals?

Suggested Topics for further discussion at future conferences

1. Infant nutrition – health, brain function, development etc
2. Success stories in research for development
3. Building capacity in the DECs
4. Issues that face Third World institutions especially NARS
5. Role of the CGIAR system versus the role of NARS
6. Twinning of countries
7. Technology versus Policy focus
8. Aligning the problem to the solution and visa versa
9. Food safety
10. Organise a discussion Forum for African scientists and journalists