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A new era of agriculture begins today

International agriculture assessment calls for immediate radical changes

Civil society statement on the outcome of the “International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD)” —from AGENDA (Tanzania), Consumers International, Friends of the Earth International, Greenpeace, International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, Pesticide Action Network, Practical Action, Third World Network, Uganda Environmental Education Fund and Vredeseilanden.

The report of the first international Agriculture Assessment, approved last week by 54 governments in Johannesburg, is a sobering account of the failure of industrial farming. It calls for a fundamental change in the way we do farming, to better address soaring food prices, hunger, social inequities and environmental disasters.

The report reflects a growing consensus among the global scientific community and most governments that the old paradigm of industrial, energy-intensive and toxic agriculture is a concept of the past. The key message of the report is that small-scale farmers and agro-ecological methods provide the way forward to avert the current food crisis and meet the needs of local communities. For the first time an independent, global assessment acknowledges that farming has a diversity of environmental and social functions and that nations and peoples have the right to democratically determine their best food and agricultural policies.

The IAASTD process itself was a path-breaking one, in which governments, major research institutions, industry and civil society shared equal responsibility in its governance and implementation. Its success proved that civil society participation as full partners in intergovernmental processes is critical to meeting the challenges of the 21st century. The global community’s widespread acceptance of this report is reflected in its approval by the vast majority of participating governments.

Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States have as yet not signed on to the final report. After watering down the formulation of several key findings during the meeting in Johannesburg, the US still claimed the assessment was unbalanced. The exact same allegation came some months earlier from the agrochemical and biotech industry. However, the report’s lack of support for the further industrialization and globalization of agriculture as well as for genetically engineered plants in particular, was based on a rigorous and peer-reviewed analysis of the empirical evidence by hundreds of scientists and development experts. These experts had been selected, together with other stakeholders, by the very same governments and companies that are now calling the assessment “unbalanced.”

The civil society groups that have participated in the IAASTD process over the past six years may not fully agree with some of the government-negotiated conclusions of the report, but they respect the fact that this report reflects the current consensus within the scientific community. We call on all governments, civil society and international institutions to support the findings of this report, implement its progressive conclusions, and thereby jumpstart the revolution in agricultural policies and practices that is urgently needed to attain more equitable and sustainable food and farming systems in the future.

Statements from civil society representatives present in Johannesburg, 7-12 April 2008

“This report proves one thing: Yes, we can produce more and better food without destroying rural livelihoods and our natural resources,”

Kevin Akoyi, Uganda, for Vredeseilanden (Belgium)

“This report clearly shows that small-scale farmers and the environment lose out under trade liberalization. Developing countries must exercise their right to stop the flood of cheap, subsidised products from the North.”

Lim Li Ching, Malaysia, Third World Network

“The Green Revolutionaries of the past, with all their expensive and toxic products, have left a trail of destruction. The IAASTD essentially says it's time to clean that up and move on.”

Romeo Quijano, Philippines, Pesticide Action Network

“This marks the beginning of a new, of a real Green Revolution. The modern way of farming is biodiverse and labour intensive and works with nature, not against it.”

Benny Haerlin, Germany, Greenpeace

“The IAASTD provides the evidence to show that locally-controlled, biologically-based intensification of farming is the only way forward. In short, it supports food sovereignty.”

Patrick Mulvany, UK, Practical Action

“This is a wake-up call for governments and international agencies. The survival of the planet's food systems demands global action to support agroecological farming and fair and equitable trade.

Marcia Ishii-Eiteman, USA, Pesticide Action Network North America (PANNA).

“It is heartening to see that the scientists refuted the usual propaganda on genetically engineered (GE) crops. They focused on the real problems and saw very little role for GE crops in their solutions.”

Juan Lopez, Spain, Friends of the Earth International.

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More information at <http://www.agassessment-watch.org> and <http://www.panna.org/jt/agAssessment>