

Recommendations of the Second Conference on Biotechnology for Asian Development

RIS in collaboration with IUCN Regional Biodiversity Programme Asia and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) organized a two day Second Conference on Biotechnology for Asian Development “Regional Cooperation for Ensuring Access and Capacity Building”, with support from UNESCO, Paris and Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Government of India in New Delhi. Some of the key recommendations are being reproduced here for wider dissemination.

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Emphasis on regional cooperation to deal with biotechnology and related safety should be a priority. Timing and resources are the key in addition to capacities. Role of education and awareness is critical to ensure not only adoption of technology but also its integration to national agricultural systems. Impacts of IPR on regional cooperation are critical and need urgent attention. In this regard, a Public-Private sector partnership is a key to success. The Conference brought together innovative partnerships. Role of biotechnology in ensuring food and nutritional securities was emphasized. However, it is early to assess the impact of this technology in Asia.

Socio-economic indicators on usefulness of biotechnology are weak and need strengthening. Responding to local needs should be a priority. The focus of private sector from this perspective needs to be further sharpened. Public sector funding is key for R&D on issues of local and national importance. Assessment on impacts of Article 27.3 (b) on national patent

regime need focus and be prioritized. Impacts of issues on IPRs and technology transfer as a part of Regional Trade Agreements need study for instance the SAFTA might provide an opportunity for SAARC.

The relationships between implementation principles of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), especially the Cartagena Protocol and WTO need critical review. Policy makers and practitioners need to work together on developing national policies. The influences of IPRs and biotechnology is felt on legal and patent regimes in India. Recent developments on legal reviews in India might provide options for other countries in the region. Bangladesh, Thailand, Pakistan, and Vietnam country papers were presented at the conference which further reflected on these points.

The discussion under Cartagena Protocol on issues of labelling, traceability should be considering local and national situation and feasibility. Currently the global discussions do not match national capacities. It came out that experiences of countries like China, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Philippines, Cuba, Mexico and others provide a good opportunity for assessing options and constraints. The need for a national policy which is responsive, transparent and relevant to local needs is critical for furthering the agenda on biotechnology and introducing the technology at commercial scale. This is particularly relevant to Asian countries. Experiences of countries and institutions on socio-economic impacts of biotechnology reveal that identification and adoption of technologies, markets, policies and approaches that are locally relevant alone would succeed for application to development planning. A starting point in this regard for Asian economies may be to urgently look into the issue of how biotechnology is being defined. As of now, there are different definitions being used which creates hurdles in the statistical measurement of biotechnology related economic activities. Cost benefit analyses of biotechnology form an important element of decision making on adoption of technology.

The conference was attended by several international agencies included World Bank, OECD, FAO, IFPRI and ICRISAT. It was emphasised that

information exchange, agreement on testing and regulatory standard harmonization at regional level can reduce costs and make adoption more affordable. There is a need for some innovative Private-Public sector partnerships. With its economic policies and national commitments by private sector, Asia may further extend experimentation on this. New initiatives for Asia like Regional Clearing House Mechanism (CHM) on biosafety, Regional Cooperative Network of Biotechnology may be considered. Some of the national agencies like US State Department, IDRC, Swiss Agency for Development for Cooperation also participated.

The conference was inaugurated by Shri K.C. Pant, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission and Chairman, RIS, while the inaugural address was delivered by Mr. M. Tawfik, Director, UNESCO. The Secretary Department of Biotechnology, Dr. M.K. Bhan delivered the valedictory address.