



PRESS RELEASE

African and EU Science Academies agree on potential of Agricultural Biotechnology to meet continent's growing food security issues

Addis Ababa, 27 February 2014: Leading African and European scientists and policy-makers ended a workshop on Agricultural Biotechnology on Wednesday 26 February with agreement on the potential of agricultural biotechnology to contribute to sustainable agriculture and address the pressing problems of food and nutrition insecurity across the continent, together with a clear commitment to provide the sound scientific advice required to inform public policy.

The 2-day meeting had been convened in Addis Ababa by the Network of African Science Academies, NASAC, and the European Academies Science Advisory Council, EASAC, which is the association of the National Science Academies of EU member states.

As Fatima Denton, of the UN-Economic Commission for Africa, emphasized in her opening speech: "African agriculture is increasingly vulnerable to environmental change as a result of climate variability and change. In this regard, biotechnology could

help in breeding crop varieties that resist pests, crops that use less water, crops that use less fertilizers.”

The focus of the workshop was on the increasing amount of African research in agricultural biotechnology and on the efforts of African scientists developing solutions to local needs, such as crops with improved vitamin content. As Professor Abdulrazad, CEO of the Kenyan National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation says: “Africans have been called “consumers” of knowledge and we should move on to being producers of knowledge. (...) This requires that we look for synergies between science and policy. ”

There was widespread agreement that increased support for such research and training was needed, along with recognition that implementation and outreach are vital to realize the benefits of such research. According to Professor Jos van de Meer, President of EASAC, a good start has been made: “However, there is much to be done. With our African colleagues we have agreed the priorities to be engaging the public, training the next generation, and devising an evidence-based regulatory framework.”

The Workshop forms part of a wider exchange and collaboration between African and European scientists, stimulated by the science academies and encompassing also other societal challenges such as Water Management, Climate Change Adaptation and Health. It follows on from a NASAC contribution to a recent report by the EU academies, “Planting the Future”, on crop genetic improvement technologies.

The workshop was funded by the German Ministry of Research and Education (BMBF) through a project between NASAC and the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina. The event was also made possible through generous support of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UN-ECA).

EASAC is formed by the national science academies of the EU Member States, to enable them to collaborate in giving advice to European policy-makers. EASAC provides a means for the collective voice of European Science to be heard. Through EASAC, the academies work together to provide independent, expert, evidence-based advice about the scientific aspects to those who make or influence policy within the European institutions.

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