

Events and Outcomes

Public Forums

In Montreal, Ibrahim Coulibaly, a farm leader from Mali, and Dr. Mwananyanda Mbikusita Lewanika, a scientist from Zambia, spoke about Africa and agriculture to a packed auditorium at the University of Quebec. The panel was moderated and participated in by Daniel Pinard, a well-known Quebec media personality. It also included members of Union Paysanne, a small-farmer and citizens' organization. Though Ibrahim speaks French and Lewanika speaks English, translators allowed the two panellists to find much in common with each other. After the panel, the audience remarked on the complementary nature of their presentations.

In Ottawa, a full panel of the international resource people **[I'm unclear on who participated in this panel. Would it be accurate for us to say "the international participants" instead, for consistency?]** was held on the night of the Roundtable. Over 500 people, including students, farmers, government workers and other Ottawa residents filled a room at the Ottawa Congress Centre. The panel was moderated by Bob Carty, a CBC Radio journalist and documentary producer, who also took questions from the floor. At the end of the evening, the public showed their appreciation for the international participants with a standing ovation.

Senate Hearing

On March 8th, a particularly dynamic hearing on Africa and agriculture was held before the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs. Ibrahim Coulibaly and Mwananyanda Mbikusita Lewanika testified with Dr. Regassa Feyissa, founder and director of Ethio- Organic Seed Action in Ethiopia and advisor to USC Canada's Seeds of Survival program.

The panellists stressed the fact that Africa is a centre of diversity for many food crops and that biological diversity is critical in ensuring food security. They further explained that agricultural policies should support the traditional farming practices that have produced this diversity and that we should be wary of introducing technologies, such as GM seeds, that will disrupt this system and endanger food security. They explained that the structural adjustment measures imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been disastrous for farmers and society at large. These measures have required their countries to dismantle supply management boards and other state support mechanisms to agriculture, and have opened their countries up to cheap imports.

When asked by Senators what Canada could do to help agricultural development in Africa, the panelists responded that one-size-fits all agricultural policies do not work and that policies should be built from the grassroots. [**“Grassroots” is normally used to describe a movement. Would “from within African communities” express the intended meaning, or is there another phrase we could use here?**]

The hearing resulted in immediate follow up. After listening to African farmers and scientists criticize the roles of the World Bank and the IMF in African food security, the Committee arranged a second hearing to examine the roles of these and other international institutions. Since then, two other hearings have occurred on related topics. The Committee has also announced a visit to Washington to demand answers from the World Bank and the IMF. All the hearings are part of the public record and have been televised nationally on CPAC. The Senate Committee also requested that the Working Group submit further information on Canada’s history of involvement in African agriculture (See Appendix v).

Parliamentary Breakfast

The Parliamentary Breakfast on March 10th was an enlightening event for both Members of Parliament and international participants. The event was sponsored and attended by MPs from three parties (the Bloc Québécois, the Liberal Party of Canada, and the New Democratic Party), who heard the participants’ perspectives on Canadian biotechnology policy. Liberal MP Paul Steckle, Chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture, was moved by the testimony of the Indian farmers. He concluded that while genetically modified organisms may be appropriate for farmers in Canada, they may not be appropriate in the developing world. Members of Parliament were shocked to hear that Canada had pushed Terminator technology at UN negotiations the month before. They requested details and follow up, including a hearing of the Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food on Terminator Technology. The Working Group is currently discussing with the committee the timing and scope of this hearing.

Feedback on Other Events

The international participants were initially skeptical about their ability to affect Canadian policy. However, at the end of the week, having had a chance to speak with a broad sample of Canadian society, they unanimously appraised the series of events as a promising step forward. It was clear to them that there was a great deal of follow-up work to be done and that it was now up to Canadian groups to carry this work forward. The group’s consensus was that sustaining the momentum created through the events and maintaining the lines of communication that were opened with government through the Roundtable would require immediate action. Some participants remarked

on the patience they saw from officials at the Roundtable. Others were impressed by the engagement and critical analysis displayed by Senators and Members of Parliament.

The group agreed that the full agenda was a worthwhile use of their time. Masanagari Narsamma, an Indian farmer and filmmaker, expressed her satisfaction with having met Members of Parliament. She appreciated the opportunity **[Is this an accurate representation of her response?]** to go to Parliament Hill and explained that she and the small farmers she works with do not usually have access to “the big people”. The farmers who traveled to Saskatoon enjoyed connecting with Canadian farmers, as it allowed them to explore common ground with farmers from different backgrounds. Begari Samamma said that it “makes us stronger” to hear from Canadian farmers, who share pressing concerns such as the impact of biotechnology on livelihoods and biodiversity.

International participants also established strong connections with each other. Colleagues of Ibrahim Coulibaly were invited to India to discuss issues relating to experiences with genetically modified seeds. Melaku Worede, an Ethiopian gene bank scientist, appreciated an analysis of the potential danger of uncritically using of the term “science.” The analysis suggests that the term is often used to glorify technological approaches to agriculture and that it marginalizes farmers’ knowledge. He committed to sending his papers to the farmers for their comments and contributions. In return, the farmers were pleased to meet scientists who were open to hearing their views and who did not seek to impose their status **[I’m unsure of the meaning of “impose their status” in this sentence. Is there a more precise phrase we can use here?]** on them. The exchange altered the farmers’ prior views of scientists as routinely opposing and denigrating their knowledge. Instead, it allowed them to see scientists as potential colleagues and collaborators.

A positive assessment from all the events was that the historically marginalized farmers, with all the knowledge and culture they represent, were put in the forefront. P.V. Satheesh, director of the Deccan Development Society in India, shared a renewed commitment to ensuring that excluded voices are heard.

The Way Forward

This experience has confirmed both a need and an appetite for innovative dialogue on agricultural biotechnology. It has also highlighted some challenges for civil society in

initiating dialogue with government on controversial issues. The Roundtable discussion was very broad, and parameters for future exchanges could be narrowed. Having tested the format and the government's willingness to participate, and knowing how much more there is to discuss, the Working Group anticipates preparing another dialogue invitation.

The Working Group will continue to monitor Canadian public policy in several areas. The issue of Terminator technology requires more attention, as does the development of a Canadian government "pro-poor science" platform on the road to the G8 meetings in Edinburgh and beyond. In addition, this experience has shown that our African colleagues are particularly concerned about the CIDA-managed Biosciences in Eastern and Central Africa project, including the environmental assessment and community consultation processes. With an increase in international discussion about investing in bioscience "centres of excellence" in developing countries, this is a topic that requires further inquiry.

Another issue appeared in late May, when top African biosafety negotiator and Ethiopian government representative Dr. Tewolde Berhan Gebre Egziabher was unable to obtain a visa to Canada in time to attend the Montreal negotiations of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Cartagena Protocol. This incident concerned observers to the CBD, especially given the Canadian government's position on Terminator, discovered earlier in the year. **[This paragraph doesn't seem to clearly relate to the surrounding material – could it be removed?]**

Internationally, there is shared concern over Canada's position on agricultural biotechnology. The Working Group hopes that through dialogue with civil society in Canada and across the world, engagement on these issues can become consultative and constructive. **[I'm unclear on the meaning of this sentence. "Engagement" is a very abstract concept – is there a more concrete word or phrase we can use to more clearly express your meaning?]**

Original text:

Other Events and Outcomes

Prior to the Roundtable in Ottawa, the group of international participants agreed to split into two teams – one to travel to Saskatoon and the other to Montreal. The first team of resource people was comprised of two farmers from India, a Zapotec woman from a farming community in Mexico, and a gene bank scientist from Ethiopia, who traveled to Saskatoon to meet with indigenous peoples, farmers, the media, and the general public. The group was invited to a meeting with indigenous peoples' representatives hosted by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians and then with farmers, hosted by the National Farmers Union and the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate. After a full day, the team presented at a public event at the Saskatoon Public Library. Feedback confirmed the importance of the evening event both for the Canadian farmers present and for the international resource people, including call to Ottawa from an 80 year-old wellrespected farm leader who commented on the prominence of women farmers in the forum and remarked that this was “the best event he had ever attended”. One direct outcome of these meetings was an invitation from the Deccan Development Society of India to representatives of the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate and the National Farmers Union to India, and a representative from each organization traveled to India in April for “Southern Encounters”, an international consultation on genetic engineering (see www.ddsindia.com).

12

In Montreal, Ibrahim Coulibaly, farm leader from Mali, and Dr. Mwananyanda Mbikusita Lewanika, a scientist from Zambia, spoke at the University of Quebec in Montreal to a packed auditorium on Africa and agriculture. After hearing Ibrahim interviewed on CBC radio earlier in the evening, at least one person turned his car around to join the audience. Well-known Quebec media personality Daniel Pinard moderated and participated in the panel that also included members of Union Paysanne. Though they could not communicate directly with one another, as Ibrahim speaks French and Lewanika English, through translators the two panelists found they had much in common and the audience remarked on the complementarity of their presentations.

In Ottawa, on the night of the Roundtable, it was standing room only for a full panel of all the international resource people. Over 500 people packed a room at the Ottawa Congress Centre including students, farmers, government workers and other Ottawa residents. CBC Radio journalist and documentary producer Bob Carty moderated and took questions from the floor. The public ended the evening with a standing ovation in appreciation of the international participants.

The March 8th hearing on Africa and agriculture at the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs was particularly dynamic. Ibrahim Coulibaly and Mwananyanda Mbikusita Lewanika testified with Dr. Regassa Feyissa, Founder and Director of Ethio-Organic Seed Action in Ethiopia and advisor to USC Canada Seeds of Survival program. The panelists stressed how Africa is a centre of diversity for many food crops and how biological diversity is critical in ensuring food security. They further explained how agricultural policies should support the traditional farming practices that have given rise

to this diversity and that we should be weary of introducing technologies, such as GM seeds, that will disrupt this system and endanger food security. All three speakers also explained how the structural adjustment measures imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have been disastrous for farmers and society at large, requiring their countries to dismantle supply management boards and other state support mechanisms to agriculture, and opening their countries up to cheap imports. When asked by Senators what Canada could do to help agricultural development in Africa, the panelists responded that one-size-fits all agricultural policies do not work and that policies should be built from the grassroots.

The follow up to the hearing was immediate. After listening to critical testimony from African farmers and scientists about the roles of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in African food security, the Committee arranged a second hearing to examine the particular role of these and other international institutions. Since this first hearing took place, two other hearings have occurred on directly related topics. The Committee has since announced a visit to Washington to "demand answers" from the World Bank and the IMF. All hearings have become part of the public record, and have been televised nationally on CPAC. The Senate Committee also requested us to submit further information on Canada's history of involvement in African agriculture (See Appendix v).

The Parliamentary Breakfast on March 10 was an enlightening event for both Members of Parliament and international participants. Sponsored by MPs from three parties (Bloc Québécois, Liberal Party of Canada, and New Democratic Party), the event brought MPs from each party to hear Southern perspectives on Canadian biotechnology policy. Liberal MP Paul Steckle, Chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture, was moved by the testimony of the Indian farmers and concluded that while GMOs may be appropriate for farmers in Canada, they may not be appropriate in the developing world. Members of Parliament were unaware and shocked to hear that Canada had pushed Terminator technology at UN negotiations the month before, and requested details as well as follow up, including a hearing of the Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food on Terminator Technology. We are currently in discussion with the Committee regarding the timing and scope of this hearing.

International Participant Feedback

International participants were initially skeptical about the ability to affect Canadian policy processes. Once the week was over and they had had a chance to dialogue with a broad cross-section of Canadian society, international participants were unanimous in their appraisal of the series of events as a promising and constructive step forward. It was clear to them that there was a great deal of follow-up work to be done and that it was now up to Canadian groups to carry this work forward. Group consensus was that immediate action was needed to sustain the momentum created through the series of events and to maintain the lines of communication that were opened with government through the Roundtable. Some participants remarked on the patience they saw from officials at the Roundtable, and others were impressed by the engagement and critical analysis displayed by Senators and Members of Parliament.

The group agreed that the full agenda was a worthwhile use of their precious time. Indian farmer and filmmaker Masanagari Narsamma expressed her satisfaction with having met

Members of Parliament. She underlined that it was meaningful for her to go to Parliament Hill and that she and the small farmers she works with do not usually have access to "the big people". Connecting with Canadian farmers was also important for the farmers who traveled to Saskatoon, and allowed the exploration of common ground between farmers in the North and South. Begari Sammamma expressed that hearing from Canadian farmers, who share pressing concerns such as the impact of biotechnology on livelihoods and biodiversity, "makes us stronger".

Significant connections were also established between international participants.

Colleagues of Ibrahim Coulibaly were invited to India to discuss issues relating to experiences with genetically modified seeds. Ethiopian gene bank scientist, Melaku Worede appreciated a newfound analysis of the potential danger found in uncritical use of the term "science"; often used to glorify technological approaches to agriculture and resulting in the marginalization of farmers' knowledge. He committed to sending his "scientific" papers to the farmers for their comment and contributions. In return, the farmers expressed that they were encouraged to meet scientists who were open to hearing their views and who did not seek to impose their status on them. For farmers, the exchange had altered their prior views of scientists as routinely opposing and denigrating farmer knowledge. The dialogue experience allowed them to see scientists as potential colleagues and collaborators.

At each of the events in the series, it was assessed that the historically marginalized, the farmers themselves, with all the knowledge and culture that they represent, were put in the forefront. P.V. Satheesh shared renewed commitment to ensuring excluded voices are heard at the center.

The Way Forward

Our experience has confirmed both a need and appetite for innovative dialogue opportunities on the issue of agricultural biotechnology. It has also highlighted some challenges for civil society in initiating dialogue with government on controversial issues. The Roundtable discussion was very broad, the parameters of which could be narrowed for any future exchanges. Having tested the format and the willingness of government to participate, and knowing how much more there is to discuss, we anticipate preparing another dialogue invitation.

The Working Group will continue to monitor Canadian public policy in this area. In addition to further engagement around the issue of Terminator technology, the Working Group will continue to follow development of a Canadian government "pro-poor science" platform on the road to the G8 meetings in Edinburgh and beyond. In addition, we have learned that the CIDA managed Biosciences in Eastern and Central Africa (BECA) project, including the environmental assessment and community consultation processes, are of particular concern to African colleagues, and further dialogue in this area will be required. With increased discussion internationally about investing in biosciences "centres of excellence" in developing countries, this is a much needed inquiry.

As recently as late May, top African biosafety negotiator and Ethiopian government representative Dr. Tewolde Berhan Gebre Egziabher was unable to obtain a visa to Canada in time to attend all of the Montreal negotiations of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Cartagena Protocol. This incident was of concern to observers to the

CBD, especially in context of the Canadian government's position on Terminator that was discovered earlier in the year.

Overall, there is broadly shared concern over Canada's position on agricultural biotechnology internationally. It is our hope that through dialogue with civil society in Canada and across the world, engagement on these issues can become consultative and constructive.