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UN warns of harmful impact on poor farmers of narrow focus on biotechnology



[FAO calls for a new approach to agricultural research](#)

1 March 2010 – An over-dependence on genetically modified organisms to boost agricultural production eclipses other biotechnologies and their potential to benefit poor farmers in developing countries, warned the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (**FAO**) today.

“Modern and conventional biotechnologies provide potent tools for the agriculture sector, including fisheries and forestry,” said FAO Assistant Director-General Modibo Traore.

“But biotechnologies are not yet making a significant impact in the lives of people in most developing countries,” Mr. Traore told the FAO-sponsored conference on Agricultural Biotechnologies in Developing Countries in Guadalajara, Mexico.

He told participants at the four-day gathering, co-hosted by the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), that most poor nations currently lack appropriate and useful technologies, policies, technical capacities, and the necessary infrastructure for the development, evaluation and deployment of biotechnologies.

Biotechnological innovations – such as rice hybrids for Africa that have doubled yields and the use of artificial insemination to raise dairy cattle milk production in Bangladesh – can contribute significantly in doubling food production by 2050 and in addressing the uncertainties of climate change, according to FAO.

However, the agency noted that there is often an emphasis on genetically modified organisms only, underscoring the need for a new approach to agricultural research and development which supports a wider use of biodiversity to promote development and improve food security.

"New technologies should make their contributions also through efficiency gains from better management of inputs and biodiversity," said Mr. Traore. "This will require greater involvement of farmers, institutions and communities.

"It will require other enabling factors such as policies, institutional support, and investment in human and physical capital and in-country capacity building," he added, urging the international community to play a key role in supporting developing countries.

In addition to taking stock of how agricultural biotechnologies can contribute to help developing countries, this week's conference will explore opportunities and partnerships to strengthen the capacity of developing countries to choose and use appropriate biotechnologies.

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