

PEOPLES' GLOBAL FORUM

Commission on Technology Transfer and Development

Friday 30 August 2002, 10.30 – 13.30, NASREC, Johannesburg

Chair: Isabella Masinde, Programme Manager, Rural Livelihoods Programme, ITDG East Africa. (+27 72 520 3524)

Rapporteurs: Eric Kisiangani, Project Manager, ITDG East Africa, Stuart Coupe, International Policy Advisor, ITDG. (+27 83 468 8497)

Situational Analysis

The livelihoods of the great majority of poor women and men in developing countries depend on micro- and small-scale enterprises of one sort or another. They must forge their livelihoods working in their fields, homes and small workshops, and by making vital decisions about the best use of their limited assets in order to survive on the tightest of margins. These women and men do not depend on employment in the formal sector, where Foreign Direct Investment is directed. Indeed, the formal sector accounts for a minority of the economically active population in most developing countries.

In every age of capitalism since the Renaissance, advances in technology have been accompanied with widening inequalities and deepening poverty. Also the impacts of technologies on the natural environment are not truly known for a generation after their introduction. Yet new technologies are being developed and commercialized at an increasing rate with no possibility for governments to have independent advice from the United Nations scientific monitoring teams concerning their adoption. The UN bodies, which used to undertake this role, were abolished at the behest of the United States in the early 1990s.

The meeting focused on two specific technology areas: energy technologies and agricultural technologies. These discussions showed how communities can be empowered by effective capacity building on technology choices, but that the WSSD Type II partnerships are very remote from these community-based efforts.

Priority Issues

The effective transfer of technological knowledge that meets the needs of people living in poverty has two critical dimensions:

- the development of peoples' capabilities to acquire new knowledge and make their own choices about technology change;
- the establishment of a supporting institutional and policy environment which fosters decentralized technological adoption in remote rural areas and in urban low income settlements, particularly information technology, energy services and agriculture and livestock innovations.

Specific Recommendations

The Draft Implementation Plan for WSSD (paras. 89 and 90) echoes Agenda 21's call for the transfer of 'environmentally sound technologies' and corresponding 'know how' to developing countries. The urgent action called for should also:

- Ensure that financial and technical support is provided for the development of dynamic national systems of innovation in developing countries, with technology policies geared towards poverty reduction and environmentally sustainable development, integrated with poverty reduction strategies.
- Provide support for technological R&D relevant to the poor, focused upon creating R&D capacity in developing countries, and support for investment in R&D and innovation by low-income producers themselves to develop their own technologies that are most suitable to local needs.
- Ensure international and national regulatory frameworks that support the development of technological capabilities in developing countries, including the regulation of trade and investment by national governments, and intellectual property rights regimes that enable access to new technological knowledge and recognise existing knowledge.
- Establish a Convention within the UN system to evaluate new technologies, especially in the rapidly evolving field of biotechnology.
- Demand that Governments must ratify immediately existing UN agreements: the Biosafety Protocol and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. There must be no patenting of Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.