

The International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology

Why be involved – why is it important – what will it achieve

The international Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) was launched last year after an extensive consultative process involving over 900 individuals in nearly 100 countries, as a unique multistakeholder participatory process. The purpose is to assess how agricultural knowledge, science and technology (AKST) can be more effectively used to reduce hunger and poverty, improve rural livelihoods, and facilitate equitable, environmentally, socially and economically sustainable development. It will analyze lessons from the past, assess how the world may plausibly change over the next 50 years, and provide options for action, by placing AKST in the context of other major demographic, economic, socio-political and cultural drivers of change.

It seeks to bring the best available information to bear on policy and management decisions, and involves experts from all stakeholder groups in the preparation and peer-review of the assessment. It will build upon related activities such as the recently completed Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the MDG Hunger task force, and the Inter-Academy Council Study on Science and Technology Strategies for Improved Agricultural Productivity and Food Security in Africa.

The IAASTD provides a unique opportunity to develop a common vision for the future, critically assess information related to a number of contentious issues, develop new partnerships, influence the future direction of agricultural research and policy formulation; influence decision makers in the private sector and governments; provide consumers with the information they need to make informed choices about nutrition and food safety; and provide farmers, foresters and fishers with the information needed to increase productivity in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner. (The IAASTD encompasses crops, livestock, fisheries, forest products, biomass, commodities and other non-food crops.)

This is an opportunity to ensure that the best scientific knowledge from the academic community is brought together with informal knowledge to enhance the role of AKST in meeting development and sustainability goals.

The IAASTD is sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO). This unique combination of international agencies recognizes the centrality of agriculture and science and technology to development and in particular to hunger and poverty alleviation, human health, and the environment.

Funding is provided by a number of OECD governments, including Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Ireland, UK and USA, with the GEF, the World Bank, UNEP, FAO, and UNESCO also contributing. It is managed through a distributed Secretariat (World Bank, UNEP, FAO and UNESCO) and four regional institutes in developing countries.

The IAASTD is unique in that it is an intergovernmental process, but with a multi-stakeholder Bureau involving all relevant stakeholders, and is multi-thematic; multi-spatial; multi-temporal; integrates local knowledge with institutional knowledge.

Multi-stakeholder: The process involves the full range of stakeholders from both developed and developing countries, including producer groups such as farmers, pastoralists and fishers, scientists (from universities, government laboratories and international organizations such as the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research); the private sector (entire production chain); national and international non-governmental organizations; consumer organizations; multilateral environmental conventions,; and governments.

Multi-thematic: It will address AKST in the context of poverty and livelihoods, hunger, nutrition and human health, environmental resources, including water quantity and quality, climate change and loss of biodiversity; and social and gender equity.

Multi-spatial: It will address local issues such as soil degradation, water scarcity and the impact of HIV/AIDS on labor availability as well as global issues, such as the livestock revolution, the collapse of fisheries and the emergence of aquaculture, and the shift from monoculture systems to integration of biological diversity into the productive landscape.

Multi-temporal: It will assess current situations in the world and as well as various scenarios for change over the next fifty years through the use of plausible scenarios. It will ask how we can reduce poverty and hunger and protect our fragile environment in a world that has a common vision and purpose as well as in a world where conflict and distrust are prevalent.