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Education In Developing Countries

By Jonathon Hardcastle

How do developing countries handle education amid the more pressing everyday challenges imposed by economic pressures and threats to security, law and order?

Certainly, there are more serious problems to face, but it is significant to note that education is not forgotten. For many, it is still the best way to overcome hardship and poverty. However elusive, it is still considered the key to a better life.

Among developing countries that are classified as "emerging markets," it is not surprising to see educational institutions that are world-class and which offer education that can rival that provided by wealthier nations around the world. These include such countries as Mexico, India, Brazil, Turkey, the Philippines, Egypt, South Africa, Malaysia, Thailand, much of South America and several of the Persian Gulf Arab States.

Unfortunately, although world-class education is readily available, it is still beyond reach for a significant portion of the population of these countries.

At the lowest spectrum of the economic scale, it is not surprising to see a low view of the importance of education as parents tend to prioritize their children's ability to make money over the longer-term benefits of schooling. But studies have shown that when poor families reach a certain economic threshold where their basic needs are met, their next priority is to put their children in school. Their next concern usually is where to get their kids a decent education since many public schools have low educational standards, which is understandable considering that teachers are often paid a lot less than in other similar professions. On the other hand, when they do find a school they like, they have to move heaven and earth to get their kids into that school because of low acceptance rates.

There are encouraging trends. For instance, India has launched EDUSAT, an education satellite that can reach more of the country at a greatly reduced cost. There are also initiatives to develop a \$100 laptop to make laptops available to most students by late 2006 or 2007 in order to give their children a digital education. Africa has also launched an "e-school programme" to provide all 600,000 primary and high schools with computer equipment, learning materials and internet access within 10 years. Other countries have similar initiatives along these same lines.

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Give Farmers the Real Products of Agricultural Biotechnology

By James Wachai

To demonstrate his frustration with the way opponents of modern agricultural biotechnology distort scientific facts to discourage farmers in developing countries from embracing genetically modified crops, Calestous Juma, a professor of Practice of International Development at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, in an opinion article in *Economic Perspectives* - a journal of the U.S. Department of State, lamented that much of the debate on the role of biotechnology in developing countries is based on hypothetical claims with no real products in the hands of consumers and producers.

"...rebutting the claim of critics is not as important as presenting the benefits of real products in the market place," wrote Prof. Juma, a fervent advocate of modern agricultural biotechnology as a tool to alleviate poverty in poor countries.

Here, Prof. Juma was challenging scientists the world over to move from theoretical posturing about genetically modified crops and give consumers and producers the real products.

Scientists from the developing world must heed Prof. Juma's challenge. The truth is that scientists, especially those in developing countries, have not done enough to help their farmers realize the real benefits of genetically modified crops. Most are always cocooned in labs, conducting never-ending experiments on genetically modified crops.

In a report released last week, scientists in developing countries were found to be completely detached from the needs of those who depend on agriculture for livelihood.

The report entitled, Will Agbiotech Applications Reach Marginalized Farmers? Evidence from Developing Countries, found that research and development in agricultural biotechnology (agribiotech) is fraught with impediments.

Key among them is that dissemination of agribiotech research and genetically modified (GM) crops to resource-poor, small-scale farmers in developing countries is almost non-existent.

As Prof. Juma notes in his article in the Economic Perspectives, those opposed to modern agricultural biotechnology have and will continue the lack of real products - genetically modified crops - to confuse farmers.

The ball is now in the court of scientists from developing countries. Developed countries are reaping a lot from genetically modified crops because research organizations heading up much of the agbiotech research are able to offer real products of genetic engineering to their people.

James uses his communication expertise to create awareness about GM food. To read more about him, go to

<http://www.gmoafrica.org>

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