

“Emerging Market Leaders Workshop on Effective Messaging on Global Food Production Issues

My Insights and Experience from Burkina Faso

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Burkina Faso

- Landlocked country in WA
- 274200 km²
- 17 millions estimated population in 2006; 40 millions in 2050.
- It is clearly stated that to overcome agric biotic and abiotic constraints in order to be able to feed these people, biotec crops are to be use as an important component of th e strategy towards food security.

- As everywhere in the world, adoption of biotec crops has been marked by controversies encompassing scientific as well as non-scientific factors.
- Therefore, communication becomes an important issue
- The challenges:
 - How to disseminate credible information to the public
 - Effective Messaging in Communicating on Agri-biotech to facilitate the input into decision making for stakeholders...policy-makers, members of parliaments and governments

The Burkina experience in effective messaging on biotech cotton

- **As far as agro biotech / biosafety communication is concerned it looks like what elders use to say: We have let the devil enter the house and now we are trying to close the door.**
- **Changing mind is a tough thing. (Tamar Haspel)**
- **Paul Teng: Without trust, communication is futile**

- Who do we trust most? Who we know; who we are confident in.
- What do we trust most? What we understand, what we see.
- I remember my first contact with some stakeholders
 - Do not touch my believes,
 - Do not impact negatively my interests
 - Do not create new fears for me
 - Do not make me lose my privileges

Target audience(s) and their information needs.

- “The public” is not a homogeneous population; rather it encompasses numerous sub-groups such as farmers, consumers, policy makers, teachers, health professionals, environmentalists and myriad others. Each of these groups constitutes a distinct audience seeking information that answers their questions and concerns with an appropriate level of detail.

Target audience(s) and their information needs.

- Farmers: How will GM seeds benefit me? Will I need to change my regular farming practices? Will I be able to sell my crop if it is GM? Why can I not save GM seed from one season to the next? If I decide not to grow GM crops but my neighbor wants to try GM, how will it affect my crop?
- What will happen to the farmers knowledge accumulated over thousands of years? Will traditional and local crop varieties be lost?

Target audience(s) and their information needs.

- Consumers: Are GM foods safe? How do you know? Do they cause allergic reactions? Could they have unknown toxic substances? Do some GM foods have health benefits?

Target audience(s) and their information needs.

- Government officials and Policy makers: Stay on power (winning next elections) ; Job creation? Poverty and hunger alleviation? Added value? How will adoption of GM crops affect our international markets and trade? Will we lose an important part of our indigenous culture? Can GM technology bring us closer to food security or self-sufficiency? How will growing GM crops affect our country's native genetic resources? What are the risks of GM varieties in small-scale research studies vs. large-scale, commercial production? How will the use of GM crops affect rural livelihoods?

Target audience(s) and their information needs.

- Environmentalists: How will GM crops affect local ecosystems? How do the risks of growing GM crops compare with the risks of conventional agriculture? What restrictions should be placed on the use of GM seeds? Will GM crops pose a threat to biological diversity? What will be the ecological effect of growing a GM crop variety in the crop's Center of Origin?

communicators

- The choice of communicators deserves special attention as it is key to effective information delivery. Who are the people trusted by each audience? Who lacks credibility? Audiences will be more receptive to what they hear if it comes from someone they respect and trust.

- A strategic plan determines when and in what order activities are conducted, based on their priority with respect to the stated objectives. Criteria for prioritizing activities might include:
 - . The nature of the audience and it's role in the adoption of biotechnology (*e.g.*, policy makers should be well-informed before taking political positions).
 - . Pending legal or regulatory events (*e.g.*, Parliamentarians should be briefed before receiving a draft law).

Effective strategies in Burkina

- Involvement of cotton producers and corporate sector in the field trials and Bt cotton adoption;
- involvement of all the stakeholders in Biotechnology and Biosafety during the adoption of the law and its revision;
- involvement of the policy-makers during the awareness-raising campaigns.
- Using experts creates credibility;
- communication specialists in meeting with the media.
- Developing skills, such as remaining calm and collected, and being able to reply to difficult questions by another question;
- constant dialogue among stakeholders: meet politicians as well as anti GM

Challenges

- Political will
- Messages should address issues like
 - Hunger-Poverty alleviation
 - Increase farmers competitiveness
 - Meeting food security
 - Ensure added value
 - Jobs creation through agroprocessing