

Public-private partnerships: Summary report of the ABDC-10 parallel session¹

The public-private partnerships (PPPs) session discussed cross cutting issues, gaps and needs for successful agricultural PPPs for smallholder farmers, to highlight successful PPPs, key constraints and needs. Case Studies were (a) development of herbicide tolerant soybean and virus resistant beans (BASF and the Brazilian Agricultural Research Cooperation (EMBRAPA), Brazil); (b) development of water efficient maize for Africa (African Agricultural Technology Foundation, Kenya); and (c) a wide range of agricultural biotechnology PPPs in the Malaysian oil palm sector. Other examples highlighted were agricultural biotechnology PPPs for biofertiliser inoculants (Mexico), banana micropropagation (Kenya, Uganda), eucalyptus genetic improvement (Brazil), improved maize for African soils (Pioneer HiBred, African national agricultural research systems) and vaccine development for domestic animals (Mexico).

PPPs can provide a mechanism to access and deploy biotechnologies for meeting 21st century challenges and needs facing smallholder farmers. The private sector comprises many entities, ranging from small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and multinationals, to retailers, farmer cooperatives, and producer groups. Agricultural biotechnology innovations (and patents) arise from both the public and private sector. For innovations to reach and benefit smallholder farmers, it is important to identify needs, priority problems and engage target beneficiaries (e.g. farmers groups) for effective PPPs. The relative roles of public and private sectors in PPPs should ensure that the public sector does not undergo mission drift and begin competing with the private sector. Strengthening interfaces between public and private sector R&D can facilitate mutual understanding and more effective PPP management. Institutional capacity of partners to ensure stewardship of proprietary technologies can limit access, where technology providers fear reputational risk. A key issue is whether regulatory systems for biosafety, intellectual property (IP) and seed systems are enabling of agricultural biotechnology PPPs for smallholder farmers. High regulatory costs (for testing, production or marketing) can act as barrier to innovation, investment & smallholder farmer access to agricultural biotechnologies. Regulatory systems which are too strict, complicated, non-functioning, or uncertain can all act as barriers to effective PPPs. Opportunities may exist for regional-level approaches for rationalisation and harmonization of regulatory procedures/frameworks to facilitate PPPs.

¹This is the summary report of the parallel session organized by FAO, with support from the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), on the second day of the FAO international technical conference on Agricultural Biotechnologies in Developing Countries (ABDC-10) that took place in Guadalajara, Mexico on 1-4 March 2010 (<http://www.fao.org/biotech/abdc/parallel/en>). The session was facilitated by Michael Baum and the Rapporteur was Charles Spillane.