

## **A Birth of New Regional Seed Association for ECO Region**

The 10 member countries of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) region comprising Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan made history on Friday 18 July in Istanbul, Turkey by announcing the birth of the new regional seed association for the ECO region. The agreement to establish this association followed an intense two-day consultative meeting amongst delegates which ran from 17-18 July 2008 under the aegis of the ECO Secretariat as an out-put of FAO-funded intra-regional Technical Cooperation Project implemented jointly with ICARDA.

The delegates worked day and night on a consultative basis reviewing the existing opportunities and unanimously reached a consensus to embark on the formation of new regional seed association that will truly represent the interests of the entire member countries and contributes to the development of the seed sector in the region. In recognition of the advanced nature of the Turkish seed industry and the leadership role it could play in ensuring the visibility and viability of the association, the delegates agreed to locate the headquarters of the regional seed association in Ankara. The decision on Friday climaxed a week-long two-tier regional workshops attended by more than 50 Senior Government officials and private enterprise personnel during which technical issues on seed was discussed from Monday to Wednesday, followed by policy session in the last two days to determine public-private partnership in the seed and the need for a regional association to translate into reality.

Also present at the meeting were international experts as well as executives of the International Seed Federation (ISF) representing the global seed industry and the Asia and Pacific Seed Association (APSA) who shared their useful experiences and lessons regarding the role of regional seed associations in facilitating seed security and seed trade of countries in a particular region.

During the opening statement Dr Metin Genckol, Director of Agriculture and Tourism stressed that "the ECO region covers about 800 million ha with rich diversity in agro-ecology, farming systems, crops and a population of over 350 million. We are cultivating barely half of the available land (only 24%) from the potential cultivable area of 49%. Obviously there is great opportunity for expansion and diversification of agriculture in the era of soaring food prices".

Dr Zewdie Bishaw of ICARDA commented that "organizing the seed industry is in the best interest of farmers. Today the winners are the farmers of the ECO region who would be served better through better organized seed industry".

During the closing statement Dr Michael Larinde of FAO remarked that "today we have planted a seed which should be nurtured to develop into a productive plant that would bear fruits".

ECO, FAO and ICARDA worked closely with member countries, and particularly the Government of Turkey in facilitating the meeting which lead to the formation of the regional seed association.

The ECO member countries collectively represent a huge seed market worth billions of dollars. The estimated domestic annual seed market based on potential demand in the top three countries alone is close to \$1 billion.

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