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Launch of the World Agricultural Report

“We simply cannot go on as before!” is how Dr. Hans Rudolf Herren, Swiss recipient of the World Food Prize, summarizes the first global report on the agricultural situation for governments and policy makers. Dr. Herren, together with Prof. Dr. Judi Wakhungu, has presided over a worldwide network of 400 scientists who have evaluated agriculture and its impact, opportunities and risks, for four years.

Picture: Dr. Hans Rudolf Herren



The final report, which is now available, has been approved by the **governments of around 60 countries** and contains, amongst others, 22 core statements which formulate recommendations for decision makers in politics and economics on how food production, hunger and poverty alleviation can be implemented on a sustainable basis.

“The approach of the ecological development projects, which BioVision has been supporting and promoting in Africa for ten years, exactly follow the recommendations set out by these international experts” says Dr. Hans

Rudolf Herren, founder and president of the **Swiss BioVision Foundation**. “I hope that this way of thinking finds its way into other circles and executive levels”

The IAASTD World Agricultural Report documents that around **2.6 billion people worldwide** depend on agriculture for survival. The great majority of the poorest people live in rural areas and are predominantly farmers. “The fact that in the past, less and less has been done for small farmers in developing countries, is fatal”, says Dr. Herren, “we must promote training, access to information, small loans and land for farmers, and also create market structures which give these people the chance to feed and support their families!”



The IAASTD report proves that enough food is produced worldwide to feed the global population. As main problems, the **World Agricultural Advisory Board** mentions dissemination and sustainability. The report documents that the increasing use of chemicals and industrialisation, as well as the lack of training and research into sustainable agricultural methods, have led to an overuse of natural resources and soil infertility.



“If we do not improve the soil and the methods of cultivation, then even the best seeds and most modern techniques will be of no use whatsoever,” – Dr. Hans Rudolf Herren comes to the point, and adds that a **trend reversal** is urgently needed. “Agriculture must become more humane and more sustainable”, he says “and we have good examples in Africa already, which show that adaptive techniques and applied research lead to solutions which help both the environment and small farmers”.

Greenpeace also welcomed the publication of the first assessment of global agriculture as an historic opportunity to replace destructive chemical-intensive agriculture with methods that work with nature and not against it. Regarding **genetically engineered (GE) crops**, the report found they are no solution for poverty, hunger or climate change. Some 60 governments signed the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for

Development (IAASTD)'s final report in Johannesburg, South Africa. The United States, Canada and Australia were the only governments in attendance not to sign. Despite being among the stakeholders who selected the report's authors, they accuse the assessment of being 'unbalanced' and are attacking the authors' independence.

"This report proves we can produce more and better food without destroying rural livelihoods and our natural resources. **Modern farming solutions** champion biodiversity, are labour intensive and work with nature, not against it," says Benny Härlin from Greenpeace International, who was on the IAASTD's governing body. "This report is a call for governments and international agencies to redirect and increase their funding towards a revolution in agriculture that is firmly agro-ecological."



It declares indigenous and local knowledge play as important a role as formal science. This development is a **significant departure** from the destructive chemical-dependent, one-size-fits-all model of industrial agriculture, reports Greenpeace. "Dependency on world agricultural commodity prices and speculation, as well as on seed and toxic agricultural inputs controlled by a few trans-national players is literally a kiss of death for small-scale and poor farmers," warns Haerlin.

In a joint press statement of participating NGOs, it is mentioned that there is a growing consensus among the global scientific community and most governments that the industrial, energy-intensive and toxic agriculture is a concept of the past and that the **key message of the report** is that small-scale farmers and agro-ecological methods provide the way forward to avert the current food crisis and meet the needs of local communities. For the first time, an independent, global assessment acknowledges that farming has a diversity of environmental and social functions and that nations and peoples have the right to democratically determine their best food and agricultural policies.



The IAASTD process is, according to the press release, a path-breaking one in which governments, research institutions, industry and civil society shared equal responsibilities in its governance and implementation. **The community's widespread acceptance** of the report is reflected in its approval by the vast majority of the participating governments.

The civil society groups participating in the IAASTD process may not fully agree with some of the **government-negotiated conclusions**, but they state that they respect the fact that this report reflects the current consensus within the scientific community and call on governments, civil society and international institutions to support the findings, to implement its progressive conclusions and to jumpstart the revolution in agricultural policies and practices. The press statement sums it up – A new era of agriculture begins today.



www.biovision.ch

http://www.agassessment-watch.org/docs/greenpeace_15_april.pdf

<http://www.agassessment-watch.org/docs/Civil%20Society%20Statement%20on%20IAASTD.pdf>

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