



AATF Response to Ethical, Social, Cultural and Commercialisation (ESCC) Audit Report 2009 Recommendations

The AATF and the WEMA teams have reviewed the ESCC Audit Report 2009 and appreciate the recommendations made. Below please find our responses to the specific recommendations made and a few others picked from the report.

Possible action related to the product development phase

- i) We suggest that traits of WEMA seed and whether WEMA is considering the idea of stacked traits be made public. This should include more information on the genes associated with drought tolerance and any other traits in the forthcoming WEMA seed, such as pest and disease resistance. This may improve knowledge, build confidence, and make WEMA seed more attractive to the farmers. It will also improve transparency of the WEMA product development phase to the implementing partners.

The source of the gene was made public last year. The WEMA communications team will be reviewing the project's information materials including the FAQ and this new information will be included. In the meantime, the press release containing this information can be found at <http://monsanto.mediaroom.com/index.php?s=43&item=710&printable>

Stacked traits are a critical issues and it may be premature to discuss it at this stage of the project. Project partners have noted it and feel that the project should first work towards producing and availing drought tolerant maize which is the emphasis of this initial phase of the project. However, the germplasm nominated by the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) and the NARS for use in WEMA will be high-yielding maize varieties that are adapted to African conditions, which will include traits such as pest and disease resistance among others. This aspect will also be emphasised in WEMA communications going forward to address this concern.

Possible actions related to the communications strategy

- ii) While the WEMA Communication Strategy provides phased engagement of stakeholders, our findings reveal that a section of stakeholders not targeted by the initial phases want to be engaged. These include farmers and associations that work with small scale farmers. Engaging with such groups may help establish project ownership and foster support of WEMA in the long run.

Some of the activities for 2010 going forward include engagement with farmer groups, seed companies and the agricultural extension services especially through the National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS). These groups will also participate in the WEMA regional stakeholder meeting scheduled for April 2010. The project feels that wide-scale involvement of smallholder farmers will be enhanced when the product is ready for on-farm testing. This is in a bid to manage expectations – also noted in the audit report as a matter to manage – and guard against undue anxiety. It should also be noted that the project has and continues to strive for transparency and engagement, while at the same time managing expectations and ensuring the timing of the engagement is appropriate for the process.

- iii) Focus further communications efforts to ensure stakeholders are aware of WEMA's charitable purpose, specifically explaining its intentions, the intellectual property rights (IPRs) of WEMA seed, and products of further research to stakeholders. This will help alleviate negative concerns about technology ownership, liability, and accountability by Monsanto, particularly in Tanzania.

These are on-going and are continuing activities through stakeholder meetings and media engagement. Also key elements in the current communication messages revolve around the project's charitable purpose and will continue to be emphasised. This also includes the fact that the small and medium-scale seed producers in Sub-Saharan Africa will actually market the seed. A summary of the Project Collaboration Agreement and Intellectual Property and licencing posted on the AATF website for public access (http://www.aatfafrica.org/wema/about_the_project/background_information) is currently being reviewed.

- iv) Provide specific responses to the issues raised by stakeholders in this report, in the frequently asked questions (FAQ) link on the WEMA Web site, in order to address the concerns of stakeholders who have Internet access.

As indicated in (i) above these issues will be added to the WEMA FAQ link and will include responses to issues raised in this report.

Possible actions related to collaboration and capacity building

- i) We recommend that WEMA consider how it might collaborate with local organisations within the five WEMA countries, including but not limited to the NARs, in the context of public awareness/communication and regulatory support. Stakeholders expressed the view that WEMA can benefit from the experience, competence, and local presence of reputable local organisations.

The NARS in the five countries are the key communicators for the project. The project involves and works with a number of the biotech communication organisations in the countries. These include the International Service for the Acquisition of Agribiotech Applications (ISAAA), Consumer Education Trust of Uganda (CONSENT) and Science Foundation for Livelihood and Development (SCIFODE) in Uganda and AfricaBio in southern Africa. Some of these also serve as the project champions. These networks and partnerships for biotech communications with local organisations will be widened and enhanced from 2010 going forward to ensure the project benefits from available experience and competencies.

- ii. WEMA should consider supporting the ongoing efforts of developing appropriate regulatory regimes, particularly in Uganda and Mozambique. The project should also strive to create good rapport with permanent secretaries (top government decision makers) of relevant ministries.

The regulatory environment is a key goal for communications and regulatory teams. WEMA is and has been supporting relevant capacity strengthening efforts in the countries. Involvement in biotech discussions has also been realised through fora such as the Open Forum for Agricultural Biotechnology (OFAB). The project also engaged government officials in discussions during its conceptualisation phase who gave their endorsement. A WEMA regional stakeholders' meeting is planned for April 2010 to which a number of stakeholders including representatives from the national biosafety authorities, policy makers like legislators representing parliamentary committees of agriculture and science and technology and top government officials from the ministries of agriculture will be invited.

Other concerns in the report include:

- i) Concerns around perceived impacts of WEMA technology on health and traditional seed systems:
These are general GMO concerns that require public reassurance. Key issues are attended to during biosafety risk communications training of project partners to build their capacity to address these concerns when talking about WEMA.

- ii) The media and general public requiring progressive updates on WEMA:
Proactive progressive information updates to media and the general public is in-built in the communication strategy, including how to deal with negative publicity.

- iii) Local seed companies have limited capacity to take up the WEMA seed when it is ready for deployment:
This is noted as a concern and should be one of the key issues to be addressed as the project enters the deployment phase. In addition, communication around this issue will emphasise that capacity building for seed producers is an integral part of WEMA; in this sense, the project represents an opportunity to strengthen seed companies and thereby ensue enhanced competition and better quality and prices for products and services for African farmers and that it will also link with and benefit from other projects such as the Program for Africa's Seed System (PASS). On the other hand it is important to note that WEMA is an R&D project that may not be able to address all the gaps regarding seed company capacity hence the need to work with other seed initiatives to ensure the systems are in place when WEMA varieties are ready for deployment.

- iv) The concern on the high cost of the WEMA seed:
This is addressed in the royalty-free aspect that will ensure that a premium will not be charged for the drought tolerant trait. This continues to be emphasised in all communication messages. However, it is important to also note that the perception that improved seed varieties are expensive is universal. In addition to the above, communication messages will also emphasise on the expected increased yield production versus the cost of the improved seed.