Hello to colleagues old and new! Many thanks to the Secretariat for facilitating this important set of exchanges.

1. *Do you consider that there is a need to include public awareness, education and participation regarding LMOs in any possible future tool for guiding the implementation of the Cartagena Protocol post-2020?*

Of course. This was one of the frequent themes during the negotiation of the Protocol, and true public participation is essential for the treaty’s proper functioning. There are obligations noted in Article 23, but this consideration must animate all the provisions for the Protocol to be effective.

The relevant information must include the Socio-Economic Considerations as per Article 26.

1. *If so, what specific elements/aspects of PAEP could be prioritized in such a tool?*

* Education must be based on facts and their context. In this regard, the many rosy reports about the safety and efficacy of LMOs over 20 years of utilization must be understood to rest on slender or non-existent factual bases. In most instances, no long-term assessments of environmental or human health impacts have been conducted for these LMOs. Many so-called evaluations are based on too short a time period to adequately capture any negative consequences. “Don’t look, don’t find” has been the operating mode for the industry and scientists who have been promoting LMOs. However, this is not an adequate approach for public policy formation, including public education. Public education must point out this serious flaw in most of the available data and studies.
* Independent scientists must be involved in the development of PAEP materials. Materials should be balanced, reflecting the full range of issues and concerns, rather than biased in the selection of information.
* In many countries, the claims of Confidential Business Information are given more weight than the protection of the public’s health and safety and the environment. Such situations need to be rebalanced.
* Relevant information should be readily available, without a need to resort to costly and time-consuming Freedom of Inform Act procedures (where these even exist).
* The Roster of Experts should be used more thoroughly to help with trainings, prepare materials for public dissemination. (I have been on the Roster since its inception, but have never been called upon by the Secretariat to provide such assistance. Is the Roster even functioning?)
* Existing resources devoted to the interpretation and understanding of information about LMOs are very skewed. Entities promoting GE spend very large amounts of money to present information that is often partial or distorted (for example, by omitting contradictory facts). Biotech regulators and academic administrators should be wary of such seemingly free but biased training opportunities

The most egregious example of this is probably the “Cornell Alliance for Science”, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation ($12 million) and housed at Cornell University in New York. The budget for this single project exceeds the total expenditures for PAEP activities of most Parties. Careful reading of the mission statement of the CAS shows that it is a PR project and international training center for academics and others to work with the biotech industry, providing “the tools and skills needed to communicate effectively” in the promotion of GMOs. It claims that “we are building a global network of science allies who share our commitment to solve complex global hunger issues by leveraging advances in agriculture, including biotechnology.” But in its goal “to promote access to scientific innovation,” there is scant evidence that CAS includes any alternatives to high tech agriculture, such as science-based agroecological production methods.

Although the organization’s director has stated that the mission of CAS is to “depolarize” the global GMO discussion and promote “evidence based decision making,” there is a clear pro-GMO bias in its work. She has a desire to reach persons who *“ may not be well informed about the potential biotechnology has for solving major agricultural challenges,*” but there is no evidence that the organization also includes information on the well-documented limitations of GE (See the analysis in “No Scientific Consensus on GMO Safety,” Environmental Sciences Europe (2015) 27:4, <http://www.enveurope.com/content/pdf/s12302-014-0034-1.pdf> )

Distorted and untrue statements: “Anti-GMO activism has stalled the adoption of genetically engineered crops in many countries, contributing to the perpetuation of unsafe pesticide use, hunger, and poverty.” Actually,it is well-documented that GE crops have increased the use of pesticides such as glyphosate over the years. And, although it is regularly claimed that GE will “feed the world,” for most crops GE has not increased yields after a spurt the first year or two, and yields thus are less, in the long run, than those from conventional seeds. (see Dr. Doug Gurian-Sherman, “Failure to Yield,” <https://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/legacy/assets/documents/food_and_agriculture/failure-to-yield.pdf>. Finally, many case studies show that over-reliance on GE cropping has led many smallholders into poverty, foreclosure and even suicide (eg in India). Indeed, an early objective of the Gates agriculture programs was based on a belief that there are too many small farmers in much of the Global Southand thus the Foundation knowingly has promoted policies that will force many farmers to leave their land—euphemistically referred to by the Foundation as “[land mobility](http://www.thenation.com/article/ending-africas-hunger?page=0,0).”

An example of the bias of CAS is illustrated by the 2015 GMO Debate event it sponsored in Ithaca, New York, where Cornell is located. The program featured prominent GMO advocates, but no critics among the speakers. This event was intended to model community outreach for Alliance fellows to use upon their return to their countries.

* Finally, public officials should understand that the best practices for engaging the public include providing mechanisms for sectors of the public to *initiate* the communication process regarding LMO issues. PAEP is a two-way street, not limited only to activities initiated by public officials!.

My regards to all,

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and

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