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The State of Foresight in Food and Agriculture: Challenges for Impact and Participation

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1. Introduction

Actionable foresight in food and agriculture faces the double challenge of including multiple stakeholders, and reaching significant impact. This paper combines literature review and case studies analysis to discuss and highlight emerging challenges related to stakeholder inclusion and impact. Cases were identified from an inventory of recent foresight studies on food and agriculture through a worldwide survey in seven languages, a bibliography and multi-lingual web review, and a review by a group of foresight experts.

The issues of participation, stakeholder inclusion and impact of foresight were debated at the second Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development (GCARD2)² held in October-November 2012 in Punta del Este, Uruguay. The presentation of an inventory of existing foresight works on food, agriculture and farming patterns at GCARD2 led a group of representatives of farmer organisations and civil society organizations to declare their intention to engage in a “grassroots foresight” initiative on the futures of family farming³. The purpose of this paper is to draw lessons from this inventory and to highlight practical actions to improve stakeholder inclusion in foresight on food and agriculture. The first section presents the sources of information, the material used and the survey methodology. The second section highlights main results related to the current state of participation and stakeholder inclusion in foresight on food and agriculture. The third section focuses on foresight impact. Sections on inclusion and impact put the results of the inventory in perspective with a review of the related literature. The fourth section discusses implications for “improved foresight” coined in the GCARD Roadmap as a “...forward-looking, anticipatory research and analysis integrating a range of perspectives on key issues, making use of the best available data and interpretations from different sources and directly integrating the diverse views of farmers and other stakeholders on specific problems, so that important issues are examined through multiple ‘lenses’” [1]. This concept of improved foresight is fully consistent with European Commission’s definition of foresight as “a process which combines three fundamental elements: prospective (long-term or forward-looking) approaches, planning (including policy-making and priority-setting) approaches, and participative approaches (engaging stakeholders and knowledge sources)” [2]. The creation of a global foresight initiative linked to agricultural research for development, the Global Foresight Hub⁴, fostering stronger involvement of stakeholders in foresight is then presented as a direct outcome to which the above-mentioned grassroots foresight initiative is linked.

2. An Inventory of recent foresight studies on food and agriculture

In 2010, a group of foresight practitioners developed a first analysis of the outcomes of ten global Futures Studies related to food and agriculture. They presented their conclusions during the GCARD1

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² GFAR in partnership with the CGIAR and the Government of Uruguay organized the GCARD2. More than 600 people from all sectors and all around the world and more than 1000 online followers participated. For more on the GCARD process see : <http://www.gfar.net/about-gcard>

³ See a video of this declaration at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL9obPhAhYU&list=UU7mMnllB6MB2lpNBQ1-2zXw&index=21>.

⁴ See <http://www.egfar.org/our-work/shaping-future-together/global-foresight-hub>

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