

Statement by the Scientific and Technological Community at CSD-16

Thursday 15 May 2008

Presented by Lindiwe Majele Sibanda, ICSU

Mr. Chairman,

The challenge for agricultural science and engineering is to provide good science and sound technologies to farmers in very diverse socio-economic and ecological systems. Much of the needed knowledge already exists within the scientific and engineering communities; however the knowledge often does not reach those that could benefit the most, in particular small-scale farmers in developing countries.

When focusing on small-holding communities in developing countries, we often rightly note our inability to match development interventions to peoples' needs. Understanding rural vulnerability is critical now more than ever before, as we attempt to deal with the looming problem of rising food costs and the changing climate.

Mr Chairman the Scientific and Technology Community is committed to helping Africa improve productivity and achieve its green revolution however, we need a better understanding of the livelihood dynamics in rural communities, which as we all know are not homogenous and yet we continue to generate and attempt to implement one size fits all interventions. For the small-scale farmers, it is essential that any introduced technology be appropriate and low-cost for their particular site specific applications. To enhance technology uptake by the poor and women in particular, we need basic disaggregated statistics on livelihoods and the coping mechanisms. This requires data that is collected on a longitudinal basis with databases that are updated regularly.

Unfortunately such information is not readily available because of insufficient investments in research and development; the whole infrastructure for data collection at household level is weak; consequently, we bemoan the poor use of research outputs and continue to plan on the basis of inaccurate data generated from short term research studies leading to reactive policies that fail to address the long term problem. The Scientific and Technological Community is calling for increased and consistent investment in Research, Development and engineering applications. There is need to use local expertise in national universities to collect data and build information databases so that the information is locally owned and used for improved targeting and pro-active policy development.

Mr Chairman, on effective climate risk management, we believe this will require greater coordination between the agricultural development, food security early

warning and response, and climate science communities. There is need to strengthen national long-term terrestrial observation systems and to establish them where they do not yet exist; and these national observation systems should be nested in the global environmental observing systems, including the Global Climate Observing System.

Mr Chairman, we applaud the commitment by African Heads of State, to commit, under the NEPAD framework, at least 10% of their national budgets to the agricultural sector. We are happy too that the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) is tasked with the coordination of technology generation and dissemination Africa-wide. We believe that at least 1% of the national budgets should be devoted to Agricultural Research, Technology Development and Extension services. Investments in Education and Infrastructure, ICTs are key. Support for scientific and engineering capacity building and training at the local and national levels is a fundamental need, in particular in developing countries.

Mr. Chairman, there is scope for us to learn from each other in strengthening Government interactions with major groups. We would like to commend the CSD for creating a platform that allows interaction and constructive dialogue between government and major groups such as the Science and Technology Community, Farmers, Business and Industry, Women, Workers and Trade Unions, and the Children and Youth and others.

We would like to see this partnership continue beyond this meeting, and be actualized into national multi-stakeholder policy dialogues, that lead to the creation of enabling environment for sustainable development.

We are aware that countries in the north have immensely benefitted from technologies and policy advice from think tanks and other major groups- this then begs the question, "How can developing countries learn and adopt such mutually beneficial interactions between government and major groups?"

Would governments, particularly in Africa be in a position to participate in formalized multi-stakeholder policy platforms such as this one at national level?

Mr Chairman, we are not talking enough, we are not sharing enough at country level, we need innovative models that enable constructive interactions; unless the agenda for sustainable development is in the hands of the ordinary citizens, our vision will remain a dream. We would welcome comments from Ministers on how best major groups can formally dialogue and engage with government at national level.

Thank you.