

Globalisation, food security and the international governance of modern biotechnology

Foundation for International Environmental Law and Development

Institute of Development Studies

Project outline

This project will assess the ability of relevant international institutions to promote food security in a context of globalisation.

The increasing involvement of biotechnology companies in developing countries presents both opportunities and challenges for poverty elimination. Few case studies highlight as clearly the intersection of globalisation with poverty as the role of biotechnology in the developing world. The absence of effective regulatory frameworks and safeguards for monitoring the handling and use of biotechnologies bring into sharp relief the limits of state capacity in this area. The globalisation of the biotechnology industry has not been matched by the internationalisation of effective regulation aimed at safeguarding the food security needs of the poor. There is an urgent need to consider what role mechanisms of international governance can play in strengthening the ability of developing countries to promote these needs.

These issues are particularly important now, following the recently negotiated Protocol on Biosafety, debates over the prospects for The World Trade Organisation "Millennium Round" negotiations, and reviews of WTO agreements on agriculture and trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPs). These provide an excellent opportunity to evaluate ways in which any future agenda of trade liberalisation can be managed to safeguard the interests of the poor.

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The research will examine the relationships between, for example, the WTO, the Biosafety Protocol, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the range of international organisations addressing food and agriculture, as well as the interaction between these bodies and national governments in developing countries. This will highlight both the constraints upon policy-makers in formulating policy on biotechnology that accords with obligations to international organisations and the food security needs of poorer farming communities. It will also highlight the opportunities for forging new linkages among institutions at the national and international level, which help to harness pro-poor biotechnology policy.

Research objectives

- To assess the impact of economic globalisation upon the ability of institutions at the national and international level to ensure that the development and use of modern biotechnology is not detrimental to the food security of developing countries;
- To explore the role and limitations of national regulation of biotechnology in the context of globalisation, and the extent to which international institutions can supplement the ability of governments to promote food security;
- To assess what forms of institutional reform will be most effective in achieving policy coherence in support of these goals.

Central questions

The central research questions are:

1. In what ways do international arrangements relating to the trade and safe handling of GMOs (genetically modified organisms) impact upon the food security of the poor?
2. What are the objectives of the various relevant international institutions in relation to modern biotechnology, and what attempts have been made to promote policy coherence between them?
3. How do international institutions structure (in positive or negative ways) the ability of national governments to promote food security in the regulation of biotechnology?
4. How do the activities of multinational agribusiness companies affect the ability of national governments to promote food security in the regulation of biotechnology?
5. To what extent do moves towards international harmonisation of intellectual property rights relevant to modern biotechnology take into account food security concerns?
6. What reforms may be necessary to enhance the protection that the international institutions governing biotechnology can provide for the world's poor in the fields of biotechnology and food security?

Proposed programme of work

The research will be carried out in three phases:

- An initial mapping exercise. Overview papers will look at (i) the relationship between biotechnology and food security in the developing world (ii) international institutional arrangements and activities of relevance to modern biotechnology and food security (iii) the way globalisation impacts upon the

ability of international and national institutions to address trade and regulation issues surrounding biotechnology;

- Two national level case studies on India and Kenya that explore the interaction between the processes governing biotechnology at the national and international level. These will be carried out alongside an:
 - an analysis of international law relevant to, *inter alia*, trade and safety in biotechnology
 - an analysis of the impact of the biotechnology industries upon biotechnology regulation at national and international levels
 - an analysis of impacts of intellectual property rights in relation to modern biotechnology and food security;
- Research synthesis. The final phase of the work will consolidate work and feed research findings into international and national level policy debates.

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