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ISAAA releases 'Voices and Views on Why Biotech?'

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"We need to hear the voices of those who think technology has something to offer so that these can resonate to others and be part of chorus that is able to make informed opinions and produce sustained action," states the brief by International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA).Â

And rightly so, the agriculture biotechnology despite its tremendous benefits for improving productivity, has been caught in host of issues related to regulations and opposition from activists. The ground situation hasn't changed since last one decade and there seems to be no easy way out.Â

As mentioned by Dr Mariechel J Navarro, director, Global Knowledge Center on Crop Biotechnology in the preface of the brief, "Voices and Views: Why Biotech?", it is a collection of personal essays on individuals from all over the world who have followed the development of biotechnology and are convinced that it has a significant role to play in improving the quality of life.

The brief no. 50 from ISAAA can be downloaded from the webpage: http://www.isaaa.org/resources/publications/briefs/50/default.asp

Through this brief, ISAAA has complied different key stakeholders' viewpoints, which are meant to generate interest in the field, inspire, and inform decision makers and to contribute to a better understanding of why the technology deserves attention. In the same manner, the essays pose challenges that the technology faces with the intent to bring opportunities to the surface as well as identify potential avenues for development.

Thirty-two experts from Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America were interviewed face-to-face or through email by members of the biotech information network of the ISAAA. These stakeholders represent policy makers, scientists, academics, media practitioners, and farmers who are willing to have their voices heard amidst the cacophony ofÂ divergent opinions. The list includes a former science and technology adviser to U.S. Secretaries of State, a World Food Prize awardee, noted scientists, economists, journalists, and farmers from Burkina Faso, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Switzerland, Thailand, Uganda, the U.S., and Zambia. They answered these basic questions: How did you get into biotech? Is there a place or future for biotech in your country/the world? What is its impact? What are the prospects and challenges?

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Respondents with technical background and exposure to biotechnology enumerate many benefits of the technology - from improving yield, reducing use of pesticides and toxic chemicals, decreasing soil erosion, and diminishing agriculture's carbon footprint; while increasing the nutritive value of major crops and generally playing a vital role in improving the quality of human life. They note many studies and peerreviewed papers documenting these benefits that will contribute to meeting the food and agricultural needs of the future. One scientist, in fact, was able to get almost 4,000 scientists to sign an online declaration in support of agricultural biotechnology, of which 25 were Nobel laureates.

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