

Final Report



EAGLES

EAGLES - Food

European Action in Global Life Sciences – Food Forum

Contract number: **514071**

Project coordinator: *Jens Degett*

Project website: http://www.efb-central.org/index.php/Main/events/european_action_on_global_life_sciences_eagles/

Reporting period: from *01/07/2005* to *30/11/2008*

**Project funded by the European Community
under the “Structuring the European Research Area” specific programme
Research Infrastructures Action**

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1. Executive summary

In 2003 Commissioner Busquin opened the meeting convened by the Expert Group of the Life Sciences on the subject **Towards sustainable agriculture for developing countries**. He spoke of the need for close cooperation between the developed and the developing world. Members of the European Federation of Biotechnology met with a number of speakers from the developing countries, including Ismail Serageldin and Huanming Yang, and suggested that a group should be established to continue to promote strategic cooperation in the life sciences between developed and developing countries. The new group was called European Action on Global Life Sciences.

The non-EU members of the EAGLES project include some of the best known scientists from the developing countries. They have put a tremendous effort into EAGLES, of course on an entirely voluntary basis, helping to strengthen the bridges between life scientists and policy makers in Europe and the developing world. They have ensured that the European Federation of Biotechnology has put life sciences in the developing countries at the top of its agenda, and made sure that European support for life sciences in the developing countries has been prominently publicised at major events in the developing countries.

Members of EAGLES Food Steering Committee

- Dr Ismail Serageldin, Chairman of EAGLES, Director of the New Library of Alexandria, Egypt
- Prof David McConnell, Chairman, EAGLES Food Forum & EFB EAGLES Task Group, Co-Vice Chairman of EAGLES, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland
- Prof. Huanming Yang, Co-Vice Chairman of EAGLES, Director, Beijing Genome Institute, China
- Prof Patrick Cunningham, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland and European Group on Life Sciences
- Dr Adel El-Beltagy, Director General, International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas, Research Centre of CGIAR, Syria
- Prof Arturo Falaschi, Director-General, International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, Italy
- Prof Luis Herrera- Estrella, National Polytechnic Institute, Mexico
- Prof Marc van Montagu, Gent University, Belgium and European Group on Life Sciences
- Mr. Albert Sasson, Special Adviser to the UNESCO Director General, Paris
- Prof M S Swaminathan, Chairman, Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai, India
- Jennifer A Thomson, Dept of Molecular and Cell Biology, University of Cape Town, South Africa
- Dr. Eduardo Trigo, Scientific Adviser to the International Directorate of the Secretariat for Science, Technology & Innovation of the Argentine Government, Argentina
- Dr Florence Wambugu, Executive Director, Harvest Biotech Foundation International, Kenya

EAGLES made two proposals to the European Commission, on food and health, which were funded. The Food project started on July 2005.

The objectives of EAGLES are contained in the EAGLES Commitment that was adopted at BioVision Alexandria, Bibliotheca Alexandrina on 5th April 2004 are as follows:

“The members of EAGLES, from the developed and developing parts of the World, make a joint commitment to work for the benefit of humanity.

The members pledge to motivate the peoples, the institutions and the governments of Europe to focus and deploy scientific resources to overcome the global challenges of disease, hunger and environmental degradation.

The members seek to make heard the voice of authoritative scientists, humanists and policy makers of the developing countries, who know and understand the problems of their countries and possible solutions from the life sciences.”

The EAGLES Food Project had the following major objectives.

- 1) To review and define strategies of food, agriculture and biotechnology research in Europe and with a world-wide perspective, in view of tackling global challenges and meeting the needs of developing countries.
- 2) To encourage open and balanced dialogue with the European public, media and opinion formers about the needs and competencies of the DEC in this specific sector.

The EAGLES Food Forum provides a platform for the scientists from DEC and the EU where they will be able to:

- Give voice in Europe through various consultations and dialogues to the needs and competencies of the DEC in the life sciences;
- give input and advise to Framework Programme 7 on collaboration with DEC countries on research on food (security, quality and safety), agriculture and biotechnology, including environmental issues;
- encourage and advise Europeans in applying more effectively European competencies in the life sciences for the benefit of the poor and needy in the DECs;
- discuss ethical and regulatory questions in the life sciences from the perspective of the needs of the developing and emerging countries and
- strengthen the global responsibilities of EU programmes in research, education, innovation, application and implementation. initiate and promote extensive international S&T cooperation and collaboration between developed and developing countries in achieving the United Nations Millenium Goals and other EU international commitments towards adressing global challenges and meeting the needs of the least developed countries.

Symposia, Meetings, Workshops

The EAGLES Food Project has ended and all the milestones and deliverables have been successfully met and fulfilled. During the last 3 years the EAGLES Food Project has organised 5 Steering Committee meetings, 3 major scientific symposia, 5 scientific workshops, 6 international conference sessions and 2 meetings in the European Parliament. The activities have been widely covered by radio and television. EAGLES has produced a series of valuable reports on food related topics and several articles in the scientific and public press which have been referred to widely.

EAGLES' overall objective, to promote the application of the life sciences to the solution of the great humanitarian challenges of hunger and environmental degradation, demands unrelenting attention. Three years is a short time in a global struggle and in order to really impact on the world and give life science in the developing world the priority the objective which we set for EAGLES requires continuous strategic investment..

We believe we have come a long way, but even if we have won some battles, the war is far from over. In order to accomplish the long term goal of EAGLES, a more permanent establishment of EAGLES as a think tank and a platform for dialogue and collaboration is needed.

Achievements

The work of EAGLES has been administered within the European Federation of Biotechnology at its new office in Barcelona under the Executive Director Jens Degett. Most of the activities can be seen on our Website: <http://www.efb-central.org/eagles/site>

The role of EAGLES was acknowledged by the European Commissioner Janez Potocnik in his address to BioVision Alexandria 2006 and our influence has grown steadily since then. As one example, EAGLES responded to the huge interest in biofuels by organising a workshop for Members of the European Parliament in Brussels in collaboration with by MEP Britta Thomsen.

EAGLES prepared a detailed critique on “The proposal by The European Commission to The European Parliament and to The European Council of The Seventh Framework Programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities”.

EAGLES did not believe that the EC was emphasising its commitment to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

EAGLES has held workshops and symposia on drought, the diet change in china, the global food supply, IPR management in poor countries, and ICT in agriculture south of Sahara. We organised two hearings in the European Parliament, issued statements and press releases, and published a series of papers, advocating more investment in life sciences related to global poverty, hunger and social degradation

Notably we have organised workshops and symposia at BioVision Alexandria in 2006 and 2008, and made a major contribution to the European Congress of Biotechnology 13 (ECB13) in Barcelona in 2007. The theme of ECB 13 was suggested by EAGLES; “Symbiosis” signifying the interaction between Science, Industry and Society. This is also the theme for ECB 14 to be held in Barcelona in 2009.

Our reports and press releases have been cited widely in the scientific and public media and we have been invited to give input to and take part in important meetings like the Science Technology in Society Forum (Kyoto)), FAO, UN, UNESCO, UNDP, UNIDO, The Initiative for Science in Africa etc. Recently EAGLES has been asked to contribute to the background reference material for the upcoming G8 Meeting in Italy. In the parallel EAGLES Health Project, EAGLES had an important contribution to the Global Health Ministerial meeting in Bamako.

Of course it is not easy to measure the effects of the EAGLES project, but we can be sure of one thing, that a group of people who hardly knew each other, drawn from the developing countries and developed countries (mainly Europe) have found a common cause in addressing one of the greatest challenges in the modern world:

How can we focus first world scientific power in the life sciences on the needs of the developing world?

Future of EAGLES

The most important sign of the success of EAGLES is that there is a real interest in continuing EAGLES activities. There is a strong interest among very influential scientists to become member of EAGLES and we have a number of very prominent researchers who would like to become part of the EAGLES board. EAGLES is planning to raise money by its own merits, independent of the EC, to form a permanent group.

EAGLES has been approached by a number of international organisations for input and advice on global development issues and is progressively increasing its status as a platform for dialogue, knowledge formation and international collaboration.

It is not an easy time to raise money in the growing international finance crisis. There is however a positive sign from 3 private sponsors who have indicated that they will support EAGLES. This is a further indication that the work of EAGLES is considered important and we have had a visible impact on the global agenda.