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World Food Security

Can Private Sector R&D Feed the Poor?

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE AND ABSTRACT FOR

Dr Thomas Lumpkin



Thomas A. Lumpkin has served as Director General of the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) since March 2008. Raised on a small farm in Washington State, USA, Lumpkin served in the Peace Corps in India, received a BSc from Washington State University in agronomy, and MSc and PhD degrees in agronomy from the University of Hawaii. He worked at Washington State University as a professor and later as Chair of the Department of Crop and Soil Sciences. Prior to his appointment at CIMMYT, he served for five years as Director General of AVRDC-The World Vegetable Center in Taiwan.

Staple Crops, Smallholder Farmers and Multinationals

Doubling food production by 2050 under conditions of climate change and depleted natural resources requires increased investment and creative approaches. The Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA) project, a five-year public-private partnership begun in 2008 and led by the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), is an excellent example. Under WEMA, Monsanto, the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), and national agricultural research systems in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa are developing, testing, and disseminating drought-tolerant maize. Efforts involve both advanced, conventional breeding techniques and biotechnology tools. Transgenic drought tolerance from Monsanto and BASF is being added to elite, drought tolerant maize lines from CIMMYT and Monsanto so that the new varieties will withstand the increasing impacts of climate change in Africa. WEMA varieties have been licensed to AATF, for eventual use by local qualified seed producers and made available to them royalty-free. The project reflects both Monsanto and CIMMYT's goals of putting advanced technology within reach of smallholders in developing countries. In this pioneering effort, important challenges have arisen around project governance, contrasts in institutional culture, managing risk, intellectual property, and external communications. More difficulties loom in the areas of regulatory approval, contracting, delivery and stewardship. Addressing these issues demands determination, creativity, and good faith of all parties. WEMA is proving a valuable learning experience for participants and, hopefully, a model for multi-sectorial alliances that focus on crucial development aims.

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