

International Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations “Civil g8 – 2006” Moscow, Russian Federation, July 3-4, 2006

*Session: "Problems and Priorities of International Cooperation
for Biodiversity Conservation and Prevention
of GMO Expansion"*

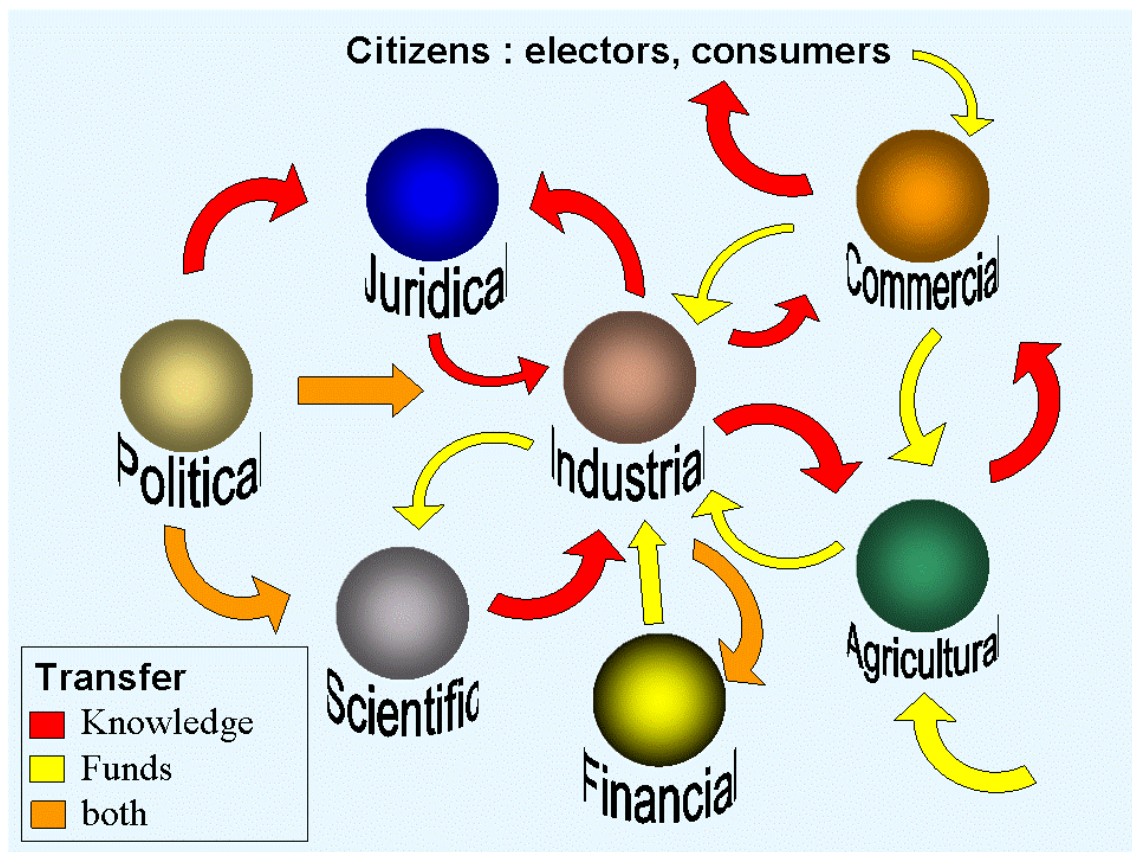
Round Table : “GMO – One of the Challenges of the XXI century”

Talk : “Getting rid of GM food: a global challenge of the next few years”

“The title of my presentation may seem a bit radical to some of you, but I guess that everybody here already experienced an increasing concern for the trading of GM crops and food. In fact, the more you learn about its environmental, health and social issues, the more you’re convinced that this trading should be stopped as soon as possible, at least the time required for conducting scientific and independent assessment; then we’d know about the actual public risks induced by the private interests of a few multinationals and their associated scientists.

In fact, scientists hold a great responsibility in the advent of GMOs, but they are not the only ones.

It’s interesting to identify the different actors of this field and the way they interact, in order to point out where our actions could be the most effective.



So, here we are: citizens, but also consumers and electors. In a democratic country, we’re electing our representatives who belong to the political sphere. Given that the main motivation of politicians is to keep power, they will try to satisfy their electors, and notably provide them with a job. As everybody knows, the level of employment depends on the economy of the country, and the economy depends on new technologies, and new technologies rely on Scientific Research. This is why the political sphere directs research towards promising topics such as agronomy - rather than ecology for instance - and at the same time will encourage the industrial sphere to be as competitive as possible.

The trick is that scientific institutes do not receive enough financial support from the government for being autonomous. So the trend for any reasonable scientist is to come and meet business men, and try to be attractive:

In the field of Genetic Engineering, the scientist will claim that putting an artificial gene into a living organism does not implement much more than what the nature did since thousands years, but better, like Microsurgery –whereas this is a very aggressive and blind technique with random results. He will found his technological developments on the simplistic and obsolete one-to-one relationship between genes and functions. He will claim that if the natural gene is safe, this will also be the case of its artificial counterpart.

The businessman will be quite interested, especially if the technology can be inserted into the food chain.

***BUT** there's another actor: the financial sphere which will ask for guaranties. So the business goes to the lawyer, and with the help of the political sphere, will obtain the extension of patenting to living organisms as well as discoveries (not only inventions).*

This will satisfy the corporate shareholders which will invest into the company, which in turn will start a contract with the scientist. Later on, the businessman will try to sell the resulting GM crop to farmers, putting forward higher yields and "less efforts", and the commercial circuit will be involved, until the consumer, whose money will come back to the farmer who will be able to pay royalties to the industrial sphere.

In the end, the profits are partly distributed among the shareholders, together with good news about the market.

***BUT** the shareholders are not told everything...*

They are not told that honest and unselfish citizens are becoming outlaws in France because of a lack of public debate.

They are not told either that Spanish farmers had to burn their organic crops because they had been contaminated by GM crops.

They don't know about the dramatic situation in South America, and in India where thousands of indebted peasants commit suicidal.

So it's urgent to act, but where on this pattern?

In France, the so-called "Voluntary Reapers" target for instance the open-air fields, not only to stop contamination, but not seriously to open the debate in front of the court. French organizations are rather well distributed over this pattern, but none of them seems interested by the financial sphere, despite its position at the basis of the whole structure.

How to influence the financial sphere ?

● **Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) :**

« A set of approaches which include social or ethical goals or constraints as well as more conventional criteria in decisions over whether to acquire, hold or dispose of a particular investment »

(Cowton, C.J. « Playing by the rules : Ethical criteria at an ethical investment fund. Business Ethics: A european review, 1999)

● **Question the future of GM food :**

- Global resistance : world citizens do not want it.
- Increasing scientific evidence concerning related sanitary problems
- Validity of patents on living being ?
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You may try to speak to the altruist, human part in him... you're not sure to succeed. The other way is to demonstrate that he'd better bet on another horse than genetic crops.

(...)

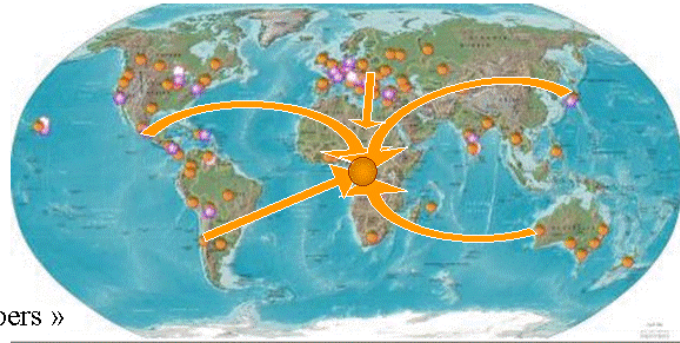
If one day the trading of genetic crops and food is eventually stopped, this will have happened through a global cooperation, and this day should be at hand. The GMO market is promoted by a few firms which operate at an international level. With the support of the World Trade Organization (WTO), GM crops are exported from producing countries, now mainly located on the American continent, towards consumer countries, such as Europe. Furthermore, from a pragmatic point of view, the only local protection of a country from GM crops would not be effective, as long as honeybees and wind exist: genetic contamination ignores borders.

Global cooperation / knowledge exchange

Global support to a local action / event

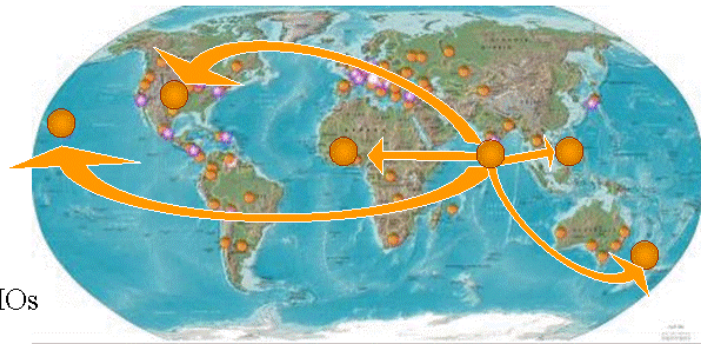
Sending emails,
hints, video-clips...
Alerting the medias

Ex: French « Voluntary Reapers »



Exportation of a local action

Ex: Krakow Declaration
for a Moratorium on GMOs



The cooperation between activists of both producing and consumer countries is essential to face multinationals, so as to be protected from genetic contamination, as soon as possible. A global support of the activists' community to local actions should be considered. Conversely, examples of local initiatives¹ could be followed, adapted and extended to other regions of the world.

- *For resistance to be coordinated at a global level, an international network could be formalized.*
- *If the G8 members realized that they miss the kind of reliable expertise given by independent scientists, which would provide them with improved credibility in the sight of the world citizens, they might even proceed towards the creation of a World Institute of Scientific Assessment...*

with GMOs as a priority topic

...Before it's too late."

Dom of Chevreuse, 4th of July 2006
(GMO Commission of Attac-France,
Amis de la Confédération Paysanne)

¹ http://www.icppc.pl/pl/gmo/eng_index.php?id=eng_declaration