

## **NECSO: A new network of researchers**

### **1. Background and rationale**

Owing to the current Doha Round of the WTO negotiations, cotton has achieved a specific status among commodities with the singling of the "Cotton Dossier", although its fate remains uncertain as it is the case for the whole Doha Round itself. This Dossier has emerged from the protest of African cotton countries which have denounced the cotton policies of a few countries/regions for the collapse of the positive socio-economic effects that the continuation of unfair policies will induce. This protest has been at the origin of an enhanced attention paid to the socio-economic effects associated to cotton production and supply. The best illustration of this move is the instruction recently given to the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) to address these effects and which is conducting the set up of an internal expert panel to deal with the Social, Economic and Environmental Performance of cotton production (SEEP).

The attention of the national, regional and international communities to the global impacts of cotton production and supply implies the tendency of questioning the researchers' contribution with regard to the information on the cotton production & supply effects. This tendency highlights the importance of recording or reporting the research outputs according to the societal issues the whole community may feel. This importance is far from being taken into consideration so far and this is not specific to cotton research, and this failure has to do with the way scientific publications are registered in existing data bases.

The current literature referencing appears to be poor and inadequate with regard to the information on the societal issues addressed by existing publications. This is because the current referencing is implemented through a limited number of keywords whose connection with societal issues is not always clear enough. This referencing also is out of control of the scientists as it is executed by librarians who may not have the required competences or the needed time to record properly and somehow exhaustively.

This situation is damaging to scientists, for their image before the whole society and for the planning of their research works. Scientists could suffer from insufficient and inadequate registration of what they do, hence not enabling the whole society to have a clear view on their real contribution to inform about the socio-economic effects of a specific production. This situation is regrettable at a period of funding reduction to research. For scientists themselves, the lack of sufficient vision is also detrimental to an efficient planning of their research activities as they cannot know what the societal issues really addressed are, how balanced they are and whether there exist orphan issues totally overlooked.

There is hence rationale for scientists to get themselves more involved in an approach to better report and share the information on the existing research works, through a network approach by associating all researchers who feel concerned by the current lack above mentioned. This is an ambitious initiative which can only be made successful if it is firstly attempted on a restricted domain. Owing to the attention raised by the Cotton Dossier, the domain of socio-economic effects of cotton production and supply appears to be a relevant one.

The constitution of a network of researchers around the socio-economic effects of a given production clearly compensates the lack of network functioning, as opposed to "hard sciences" for which dynamic networks can be commonly found (notably in the area of genomics for instance). The set up of a network by itself cannot ensure its dynamism. It is critical to find out a common activity for continuous interaction between the network members. Owing to the above analysis, this activity will be the feeding and sharing of information on existing publications linked to socio-economic effects of cotton production and supply. In other words, this original management of scientific publications will be both the cause and the effect of the network constitution.

## **2. Network initiative**

### **2.1. NECSO set up**

NECSO (Network of Cotton Socio-Economists) is set up as an initiative of the ISSCRI Project. This Project (Integrating Social Science Research into Cotton Reform Implementation lined with the international outlook) is funded by the European Commission and targets at assisting the adjustment of the cotton policy in Europe. More information can be found at the Project website <http://www.isscri.org>

NECSO is a new network of scientists involved directly or indirectly in cotton research and whose results can help inform on the socio-economic effects related to cotton production and supply in the world. Its members share commonly the target of continuously feeding a new data base destined to report research and development publications according to the societal issues they addressed directly or indirectly. This implies that the network members will have to commit with identifying, selecting and organizing social science research studies that deal with the issue of socio-economic aspects of cotton production.

The exploitation of this data base will help the better inform on the research contributions to clarify important societal issues. Indirectly, the update of the data base will enable the network members to better know each other and to better interact in view of launching new research collaborative works. The network should provide information to favour scientifically-based policy orientation, in the EU but also in other geographic regions.

The dynamism and the impact of the network will depend on the real participation of members, basic condition for the network to achieve some influence on policy making and solving cotton issues.

The objectives of the network can be summarized as follows:

- To share knowledge on socio-economic aspects of cotton production and supply
- To develop, feed and update a data base of existing documents on socio-economic impacts of cotton production
- To provide synthesis report so as to sustain scientifically-based policy orientation

## **2.2. NECSO specific tool**

The ambition of leading researchers to commonly feed a literature reference data base is fully dependent of the availability of an adapted computer tool enabling decentralized feeding and also multilingual interfaces for its use. The prototype of this tool, called COLIRE (Cotton production impacts Literature References) is yet almost completed by using Access software but its conversion into an Internet tool is critical as it is the unique form really adapted to the requirements of quick and decentralized feeding of the common data base. This conversion is being engaged but will take some time before completion.

Meanwhile, it is retained to test the COLIRE data base by using the Access version in order to, in one hand exhaustively record references from Spain and Greece, and in the other hand selectively record relevant references from various other countries.

## **2.3. Option in feeding the COLIRE data base**

In the future, once the Internet tool is operational, in addition of enabling each network members the references of his/her publications, each member could/should reference publications they know that are of relevance to inform on particular societal issues related to cotton production and supply. This option has two advantages. One is to achieve a data base content of significant volume. Second is to have non-members to react on their publications the NECSO has referenced and hence attracting them to join.

## **2.4. Membership**

Membership to the NECSO is not restricted to scientists with socio-economics academic background. It is open to any scientist whose research works have dealt the socio-economic aspects linked to the production and supply of cotton. Furthermore, even though the nucleus of the network will start firstly through the Spanish, Greek and French scientists involved in the ISSCRI Project, the network's explicit aspiration is to build a platform for co-operation which can be extended to any other European or non European country.