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Bridging the Emerging Genomics Divide

Status	Past
Competition	II
Sector	GE ³ LS (Genomics and Ethical, Environmental, Economic, Legal and Social issues)
Genome Centre	Ontario Genomics Institute
Project Leader	Peter Singer and Abdallah Daar

Project Description

While life expectancies in industrialized countries are about 80 years and rising, in some developing countries, especially due to HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, life expectancies are 40 years and falling. Inequalities in knowledge underlie these differences in health.

We have contributed to reducing these inequalities by examining the ethical, environmental, legal and social implications of advances in biotechnology and genomics.

We studied ethical questions faced by biotechnology companies and how they deal with them; our aim is to encourage companies to adopt suitable ethical policies. We led in writing a proposal for the Canadian government to guide its strategy for development of genomics and biotechnology; this has had an important affect on federal policy. We were a major contributor to the Genomics and Nanotechnology Working Group of the United Nations Science and Technology Task Force; this report was distributed all over the world. We led in the creation of a report which pointed out that in guarding against biological terrorism we should not undermine our ability to apply genomics for social benefit, especially in developing countries; the United Nations recommendations for a counter-terrorism strategy included reference to these conclusions. We conducted courses in five regions of the developing world, with 232 participants from 58 countries, to help these countries shape policies in genomics and public health. We produced ethical guidelines for research, development, regulation and commercial use of nutritional-genomics and transgenic food products.

Fast Facts

Highlighted outcome: Reports and articles that address world-wide biotechnology issues.

Number of research personnel employed by the project: 5 graduate students, 2 post-doctoral fellows, 19 research associates and assistants, and 12 undergraduate students

Number of peer reviewed publications published: 17, plus 12 books and monographs, and 5 book chapters

Number of public outreach events held: 49 lectures, 1 public forum, media coverage - 118

Co-funders: International Development Research Centre, National Institutes of Health, Indian Council for Medical Research, University of Guelph, Merck Frosst, Ontario Centre for Agricultural Genomics, World Health Organization (EMRO), United Nations University (BIOLAC), Pan American Health Organization and the Keck Graduate Institute