

Should social and political factors have a role in GMO regulation?

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.

India's former Union Agriculture Minister, Sharad Pawar, recommended that the Prime Minister remove an existing rule that requires a no-objection certificate (NOC) from the relevant state government before allowing field trials for GM crops. Pawar argued that obtaining consent from state governments had become a "socio-political process rather than an *objective, science-based process* of rigorous evaluation at the state level" (emphasis added).

Regardless of your view on regulation of GM crops, there are two problems with the statement that Pawar offers in justification. The first assumes that the influence of social and political factors on a decision-making process that will impact livelihoods and the environment is somehow inappropriate. The second is a belief in the ability of science to be neutral and to guide us to the 'correct' decision.

The compulsion to eliminate arbitrariness in decision-making inevitably comes up against the need to provide appropriate weight to non-scientific and non-technical factors. Regulators the world over struggle to find common metrics through which scientific, economic and social considerations can be compared.

In *Designs on Nature: Science and Democracy in Europe and the United States*, Sheila Jasanoff explains how different societies receive, understand and construct scientific knowledge differently. The same scientific risk assessment about the same GM crop may elicit completely opposite responses in different societies.

India's regulation of GMOs represents an opportunity to rethink the role of public participation and non-technical knowledge in environmental regulatory discourse. As a society, we need to play a more active role in interpreting science and challenge its ownership by government and technocratic elites.

Read full, original post: [How We Should Rethink the Role of Technical Expertise in GMO Regulation](#)