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14 January 2003

NOTIFICATION

**Re: Summary of the Outcomes of the Liaison Group Meeting on
Capacity-building for Biosafety**

Madam/Sir,

I am pleased to convey to you herewith attached a brief summary of the outcomes of the Liaison Group meeting on Capacity-building for Biosafety which was held from 4-5 November 2002 in Montreal. The meeting came up with useful suggestions, which I think would be helpful to you as you implement the Action Plan for Building Capacities for the Effective Implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

Let me also take this opportunity as well to remind you that the ICCP, at its third meeting, urged "Parties, Governments and relevant organizations to register information on their biosafety capacity-building initiatives in the Biosafety Clearing-House, including reports on the achievements, lessons learned and opportunities for cooperation".

Accept, Madam/Sir, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Hamdallah Zedan
Executive Secretary

To: ICCP National Focal Points
CBD National Focal Points (where ICCP focal points have not yet been designated)



**SUMMARY OUTCOMES OF THE LIAISON GROUP MEETING ON
CAPACITY-BUILDING FOR BIOSAFETY
(Montreal, 4-5 November 2002)**

INTRODUCTION

The Liaison Group meeting on Capacity-building for Biosafety was held from 4 to 5 November 2002 in Montreal, Canada. Eighteen participants from government agencies and relevant inter-governmental, non-governmental and private sector organizations attended the meeting.

The meeting was convened to provide advice to the Executive Secretary regarding possible practical modalities for the operationalization of the Coordination Mechanism and for advancing the implementation and monitoring of the Action Plan for Building Capacities for the Effective Implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. Four main items were discussed by the meeting namely: (1) coverage of existing projects/initiatives and gaps in implementation of the capacity-building Action Plan; (2) operationalization of the Coordination Mechanism; (3) ways and means to enhance complementarity, synergies and partnerships between existing projects/ initiatives; and (4) review of the preliminary set of indicators for monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan.

The following is a summary of the comments and main recommendations made by the Liaison Group, which Parties and Governments might find useful during the implementation of the Action Plan for Building Capacities for the Effective Implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety at different levels:

RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementation of the Action Plan

- It was observed that sharing of information regarding existing biosafety capacity-building initiatives is crucial for enhancing coordination of such efforts and for identifying gaps and coverage. The projects database, which is part of the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH), should be the key means for sharing that information.
- The projects database currently has a few initiatives registered, although there are a number of relevant on-going projects and other initiatives in different countries/regions. All Parties, Governments and organizations implementing or supporting such initiatives should be encouraged to register them in the BCH so that the database is more comprehensive. Any person who knows about relevant initiatives that are not currently in the database should inform the Secretariat and provide the contact details, so that the Secretariat can follow it up directly.
- It may be worthwhile to use both positive and negative incentives to encourage countries to register information in the projects database, with strong emphasis on

former. Possible incentives could include: making funds for reporting available in the project budgets, making disbursement of project funds dependent upon submission of information (including progress reports) to the projects database in the BCH or ensuring that there are obvious benefits to sharing information through the databases.

- Countries without direct access to the BCH should be encouraged to send whatever information they have available in hard copy (e.g. workshop reports) to the CBD Secretariat for entry into the BCH.
- There is a need to maximize capacity-building efforts to address all elements of the Action Plan. It is expected that any given element of the Action Plan will be addressed by many different initiatives. However, unnecessary duplications should be avoided.
- It should be a requirement for countries to disclose all related initiatives supported from different sources before funding is provided to avoid unnecessary overlaps or funding of the same activities already supported by others. Donor agencies should make this a condition.
- Coordination among donors and implementers at international, regional and national levels is important to avoid overlaps which do not make productive contributions to capacity-building, and may even be counterproductive.
- Understanding of the precise capacity-building needs in each country is important so that initiatives are tailored to the needs and priorities expressed by the country, and are developed in a bottom up fashion, not top-down.
- To this end, all developing countries should be encouraged to assess and register their capacity needs in the “Country Capacity Needs” database in the BCH. More detailed categorization of fields and addition of specific needs in the database could be useful for more precisely characterizing needs and allowing users to be more specific in their searches (e.g., capacity for dealing with gene flow non-target effects, confidential information, etc.).
- Assessment of capacity needs at the regional level in terms of who is ready for what and who is already doing what would be also useful for donors. The databases in the BCH would be useful in this regard.
- South-south cooperation and coordination is important and should be promoted. Currently, this is still limited, particularly in certain areas such as technology transfer. Sub-regional centres of excellence may be useful in this regard.

Operationalization of the Coordination Mechanism

- The meeting also considered the following five elements of the Coordination Mechanism endorsed by the ICCP, and made suggestions for their practical implementation:
 1. Liaison Group on Capacity-Building for Biosafety
 2. Databases on biosafety capacity-building projects, opportunities and country needs and priorities, which are maintained in the BCH.
 3. Information-Sharing and Networking Mechanism which could comprise the different tools, including:
 - A Biosafety Capacity-building E-mail Listserv
 - Biosafety Capacity-building Electronic Discussion Forums
 - Online Electronic Conferences (over a limited timeframe)
 - Online Open Forum (on-going, unlimited participation, no prior registration)
 - A Virtual Private Network for organizations and donors supporting biosafety capacity-building activities
 - Bulletin boards on the BCH where information on new planned projects could be posted.
 4. Coordination meetings and workshops
 - Sub-regional and regional coordination workshops
 - An Inter-Agency Consultative Forum
 5. Reporting mechanism - central depository for information submitted pursuant to ICCP/ COP-MOP requests, e.g. progress reports on the implementation of the Action Plan and reports on the achievements, lessons learned and opportunities for cooperation
- Initial emphasis should be placed on operationalizing the Liaison Group, coordination meetings and databases. The use of electronic means of networking should be given less emphasis at the moment since many developing countries still lack the necessary information/communication technologies and internet access.
- The Liaison Group should be small and flexible enough to rapidly respond to emerging needs. However, for purposes of institutional memory, it might be necessary to maintain some degree of consistency in the composition of the Group.
- The projects, opportunities and country needs databases should play a big role in identifying the coverage, overlaps and gaps in the building of capacities for biosafety.
- Coordination meetings should be adaptive and opportunistic. They should not necessarily follow a regular schedule.
- It would be worthwhile for countries to implement a Coordination Mechanism at the national level. National Focal points should be encouraged to ensure that coordination happens at the national level.

Ways and Means to Enhance Complementarity, Synergies and Partnerships

- It may be useful to convene informal meetings among donors, for example on the margins of other relevant meetings/events, to discuss country needs for particular regions, and to understand the state of play – which donors are addressing or planning to address which needs or to co-finance what. This will make coordination activities more focused and help identify potential partnerships.
- An inter-agency consultative forum should be established for donors and organizations providing capacity-building support, to facilitate harmonization of conceptual frameworks and approaches.
- When organizing workshops or other activities under a particular initiative, it would be useful to invite participants from donors, organizations and where possible other countries working on similar capacity-building initiatives in order to promote cooperation and harmonization.
- Governments or organizations undertaking capacity-building on similar themes should be encouraged to establish joint initiatives/ partnerships - pool resources and organize joint activities (e.g. workshops, training, etc).
- In designing capacity building initiatives, it is important to consider the political will and political context in targeted countries, as part of evaluating the likely effectiveness of the initiatives.
- The BCH, in particular the projects, opportunities and country needs databases can assist to bring about the harmonization and complementarity.
- Establishment of regional centers of excellence especially with regard to the BCH and technology transfer could be a useful coordination mechanism at regional level.

Indicators for monitoring implementation of the Action Plan

The Liaison Group discussed the preliminary set of indicators for monitoring the Action Plan for Building Capacities for the Effective Implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and made the following key recommendations:

- Indicators should be developed in the context of the envisioned results of capacity-building initiatives, following conventional approaches, and should help determine if actions being taken are effective, efficient, and cost-effective and if the results have the desired impact.
- Wherever possible, indicators should be measurable, time-bound and not subjective in nature. Also, they should not be worded in ways that express unjustified opinions

about the current state (e.g. opinions about the frequency of illegal transboundary movements).

- The matrix for the preliminary set of indicators considered by ICCP-3 should be expanded to include elements such as objectives, envisioned results, criteria, means of verification, and consequences of poor performance
- It would be advisable to separate indicators applicable at the different levels – national, regional/sub-regional, and international levels.
- It may be appropriate to give examples of indicators but avoid prescribing a particular list of indicators – as each country situation will be different and the appropriate indicators may differ.
- Monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan should not be too burdensome and costly for countries, given that in many cases there is need for baseline information which is not readily available.

CONCLUSION

The meeting noted that capacity-building for biosafety is a daunting task that requires collaborative efforts by several actors. It is only through combined and coordinated actions that real progress would be made in building the necessary capacities for the effective implementation of the Protocol in an efficient and sustainable manner. The Liaison Group underscored the importance of ensuring coordination among different initiatives and the need to avoid unnecessary overlaps and duplications, and to address the existing gaps. The Action Plan,

which was agreed upon by several countries at the ICCP, provides a general strategic framework outlining the priority elements, processes and broad actions. It should serve as a reference for Governments, donors and organizations intending to undertake or provide support for biosafety capacity-building. Ultimately, all initiatives should be implemented in line with the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.