

## **ONLINE DISCUSSIONS ON BIOSAFETY COMMITMENTS FROM NON-STATE ACTORS FOR THE ACTION AGENDA FOR NATURE AND PEOPLE**

27 SEPTEMBER - 24 OCTOBER 2021

### **Moderators' summary**

1. In opening the online discussions on non-state actors' engagement in the Action Agenda for Nature and People, the moderators highlighted the themes and the relevant guiding questions. As of 24 October 2021, 130 messages were posted and 603 participants, comprised of representatives of Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety; non-Parties; relevant organizations; United Nations agencies; and indigenous people and local communities (IPLCs), were registered for the online discussions. The online discussions also had seven moderators, comprised of representatives from a Party; regional BCH advisor; the private sector; non-governmental organizations; IPLCs; multilateral regional organization; and academia, to foster a wide range of representatives.
2. The following six themes were introduced: (a) best practices and opportunities; (b) the importance and needs of biosafety commitments and engagements; (c) key features, criteria and methods on the Action Agenda; (d) monitoring, reporting and evaluation of progress of commitments; (e) existing information-sharing measures; (f) opportunities for information-sharing measures.

### **ONLINE DISCUSSION GROUP 1: EMERGING BEST PRACTICES, NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

#### **Webinar (27 September 2021)**

##### **Theme 1: Best practices and opportunities**

3. Under this theme, a webinar was first held to launch initial discussions. The webinar was organized in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Nature Hub. A total of 174 participants attended the webinar. The webinar was organized to: (a) provide an initial discussion on the importance and features of the Action Agenda for Nature and People to mobilize biosafety commitments from non-state actors; and (b) strengthen familiarity with the importance of and guidance to making a commitment in the Action Agenda. The webinar recording is available at [https://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal\\_art23/actionagendaforum/](https://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_art23/actionagendaforum/)
4. Under Theme 1 on best practices and opportunities, there were a total of 76 inputs from participants. The major best practices and opportunities highlighted included: (a) national, regional and international legislation; (b) other systems promoting non-state actors; (c) the types of non-state actors; (d) capacity-building opportunities that non-state actors could undertake; (e) good practices in communication and partnerships between Parties and non-state actors; and (f) key events or initiatives for non-state actors. The theme had the most inputs out of the 6 themes in the online discussions.

##### **Legislation and other systems promoting non-state actors**

5. Regarding existing legislation, some respondents highlighted national legislation involving non-state actors leading to mechanisms and other systems involving non-state actors. Some submissions noted that the legislation was based on public awareness, education and public participation regarding LMOs and or risk assessment of LMOs.
6. Regarding international and regional legislation promoting non-state actors' involvement on LMO-related issues, participants noted the following: (a) the Convention on Biological Diversity, including Article 14 on "Impact Assessment and Minimizing Adverse Impacts" involving public participation procedures; (b) the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, including Article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety on promoting public awareness, education, and participation concerning LMOs and Article 26 of

the Cartagena Protocol on socio-economic considerations; and (c) the Aarhus Convention including the 6 bis amendment related the GMO Amendment promoting public participation regarding LMOs.

7. Regarding other systems, some respondents highlighted national ongoing activities involving non-state actors. Some of these ranged from public hearings, advisory bodies (e.g. councils, national committees and commissions), seminars and fora (e.g. youth Chinese forum on synthetic biology and conservation resulting in Youth Declaration), dissemination of information (e.g. notifications, print materials, promotional materials and events), developing strategies (e.g. involving IPLCs, education) and capacity-building projects.

8. Regarding other systems, respondents highlighted regional and international activities involving non-state actors on biodiversity and biosafety. The involvement was through strategies, training and discussions. Some of the international activities that participants noted were important included: (a) the Action Agenda for Nature and People to mobilize biosafety commitments from non-state actors, including highlighting existing biosafety commitments from the private sector, NGOs and IPLCs;<sup>1</sup> (b) the programme of work on public awareness, education and participation regarding LMOs (2011-2020), including its priority areas, promoting a system and national guidance on involving non-state actors through awareness, education, access to information and public participation regarding LMOs;<sup>2</sup> (c) the Joint CBD/Aarhus Convention Pocket guide on promoting effective access to information and public participation regarding LMOs/GMOs and its guidance to many non-state actors<sup>3</sup> (d) the UNEP-GEF BCH III projects providing funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for eligible Parties to implement BCH, including training government representatives but also industry, importers, farmers, NGOs and media on a national, regional and global level; (e) awareness-related and training activities to enhance participation of non-state actors in technical issues (e.g. publications and projects on risk assessment of LMOs by Croplife International as well as research and capacity-building activities by GenØk).

#### *Types of non-state actors*

9. Many participants also noted a range of non-state actors that are or should be involved in initiatives (e.g. indigenous peoples and local communities, women's groups, youth organizations, NGOs, the private sector, scientists/academia, youth, consumers financial sector, Aarhus Centres, women's' groups, farmers, local governments, professional associations, media, consumer associations, communication professionals, associations, international or regional organizations).

10. Many noted also that non-state actors are or should be part of decision-making process regarding LMOs (and synthetic biology) nationally (e.g. councils, committees, capacity-building training, public awareness, education and participation activities) and globally (e.g. expert group meetings).

#### *Capacity-building opportunities*

11. Many submissions noted that there could be many types of capacity-building activities that non-state actors could undertake to support capacity-building action plan for the post-2020 period.

12. Some submissions noted that training is needed, in particular risk assessment of LMOs as well as handling, transport, packaging and use of LMOs. This would also entail that non-state actors can train other non-state actors on biosafety issues. For regional international organizations, for example, a respondent noted that capacity-building events could bring together a number of different non-state actors (e.g. academia, the private sector, IPLCs) and governments, including training on risk assessment and synthetic biology.

13. In line with this, some submissions also highlighted the importance of indigenous peoples and local communities taking the lead in biodiversity and biosafety actions, in particular with their traditional

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<sup>1</sup> The Action Agenda for Nature and People is available at <https://www.cbd.int/portals/action-agenda/>

<sup>2</sup> The programme of work and its priority areas is available at [http://bch.cbd.int/protocol/cpb\\_art23\\_pow.shtml](http://bch.cbd.int/protocol/cpb_art23_pow.shtml)

<sup>3</sup> The Pocket Guide is available at [https://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal\\_art23/resources.shtml#tab=2](https://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_art23/resources.shtml#tab=2)

knowledge and proximity to nature, as recommended by the IPBES recommendation. The areas of support that IPLCs would contribute but also NGOs was not only risk assessment of LMOs and socio-economic considerations regarding LMOs and cultural approaches but also detection and identification of LMOs and awareness-raising and education. NGOs were also key in playing an important role as supporting in capacity-building for government officials and mobilize the public on different biosafety issues.

14. Some submissions also noted that the private sector and other non-state actors can contribute to capacity-building through projects, training meetings, workshops, action plans, research and publications (e.g. reports, papers, journals) and databases (e.g. BioTradeStatus). The areas of work range from risk assessment of LMOs and public awareness, education and participation to handling, transport, packaging and identification of LMOs and socio-economic considerations of LMOs.

15. Other important non-state actors were also mentioned as players that could support capacity-building activities and raise awareness were, in short, local governments, youth and scientists.

#### **Good practices in communication and partnerships between Parties and non-state actors**

16. In response to some good practices in enhancing communication and partnerships between Parties and non-state actors, some of the inputs included: (a) discussion groups and round tables; (b) meetings and training activities at international, regional and national levels; and (c) communication strategies and guidelines. Many submissions noted that the good practices should be organized by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and other UN MEAs (e.g. Aarhus Convention), regional entities (e.g. EU, IICA) and NGOs.

17. Some other key points raised by participants were as follows: (a) NGOs and IPLCs should raise awareness of the their forums to others for partnerships; (b) improving access to biosafety information (e.g. databases) to non-state actors, in particular indigenous peoples and local communities, to ensure free, prior and informed consent and active participation in the decision-making process regarding LMOs; (c) ensuring capacity-building for non-state actors (e.g. technical and human); (d) sharing of information with many viewpoints involving non-state actors; and (e) participation in many areas (e.g. socioeconomic considerations of LMOs).

18. It was generally agreed that funding for non-stakeholder participation in key events and initiatives but also funding for promoting their own events was important.

#### *Key events or initiatives for non-state actors*

19. With regard to key events or initiatives that non-state actors are or should be involved in, almost all noted that they should be involved in all events and initiative at the national, regional, and international levels.

20. Many participants emphasised the need for funding for non-state actors, in particular NGOs, IPLCs and local governments. It was noticed that development agencies, funding agencies and/or governments should provide or coordinate with governments financial resources to non-state actors (e.g. local governments, NGOs, indigenous peoples and local communities) to implement biosafety and biodiversity issues (e.g. based on the Edinburgh Declaration).

21. Some participants also noted that training and outreach activities are important for non-state actors to be part of related to biosafety. More details was provided such as: (a) regional organizations providing training, including courses, related to risk assessment of LMOs, synthetic biology for non-state actors; (b) indigenous peoples and local communities being part of training activities in cultural appropriate; and 3) Private-public partnerships to celebrate biodiversity days and other awareness activities.

22. Many submissions also noted the importance of non-state actors involved in events and initiatives relating to negotiations on a national or international level to discuss legislation and other issues as well as enhance collaboration with other non-state actors.

## **Theme 2: The importance and needs of biosafety commitments and engagement**

23. Under Theme 2 on the importance and need of biosafety commitments and engagement, a total of 12 inputs were provided by participants. The major outcomes included: (a) the identification of key biosafety topics and challenges that need more attention from non-state actors; and (b) benefits of engaging more non-state actors.

### **Key biosafety topics and challenges**

24. Some of the key biosafety topics that need more attention from non-state actors on the long-term to implement the draft post-2020 implementation plan and the capacity-building action plan for the Cartagena Protocol that is expected to be adopted by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol at its tenth meeting were highlighted by submissions received during the online discussions. It was generally agreed that the main topics needing attention was public awareness, education and participation of LMO issues, including access to information, socioeconomic considerations of LMOs and capacity-building as well as risk assessment and risk management of LMOs. It was also noted that there is a need to enhance the implementation of National Biosafety Frameworks in order to enhance the participation of non-state actors, in particular in developing countries.

25. There were also some general challenges highlighted as needing attention from non-state actors. Some of the details were as follows: (a) address those that would have direct influence on areas with high biodiversity influence; (b) urgent need to develop guidelines and tools to adequately mainstream the non-state actors in partnerships and collaboration; the need for national biosafety frameworks with public awareness, education and public participation, including access to information, procedures to ensure Article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety is implemented; (c) develop and implement projects, such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) or Food and Agriculture Organizations (FAO) related projects, that make use of the gender action plan and for women and indigenous peoples and local communities to participate in implementing the draft implementation plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.<sup>4</sup> A respondent also highlighted the importance of gender analysis report as a country gender overview for countries to implement the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety while making use of a gender action plan.

### **Benefits of engaging more non-state actors**

26. Some submissions noted benefits of engaging non-state actors in supporting the draft implementation plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the target related to biosafety in the Global Biosafety Framework and/or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

27. Many submissions noted that engaging non-state actors, in particular women, youth and/or indigenous peoples and local communities, provides information on traditional knowledge and methods as additional technical capacity as well as addressing risk assessment and risk management of LMOs. In this regard, it was important that non-state actors are part of planning, dialogues and decision-making of projects, plans and programmes on a local and national level. Promoting also understanding of different views regarding, for example, risk assessment of LMOs, could provide accepted final decisions of imports of LMOs.

28. Some practical benefits were also highlighted from some submissions. The details entailed involving non-state actors in advisory bodies (e.g. national biosafety committees), integrating biosafety into academia through biosafety curricula at universities and colleges as well as well partnerships with academia for outreach and capacity-building purposes.

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<sup>4</sup> Developing and measuring a gender-responsive post-2020 biodiversity framework: information on gender considerations within the draft post-2020 monitoring framework is available at <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/1121/e399/19809c62e65638184c9283bf/sbstta-24-inf-30-en.pdf>

## **ONLINE DISCUSSION GROUP 2: DEVELOPMENT OF CONCRETE AND MEASURABLE COMMITMENTS**

### **Theme 3: Key features, criteria and methods on the Action Agenda**

29. Under Theme 3 on key features, criteria and methods on the Action Agenda, there were 5 inputs from participants. The main inputs included: (a) enhancing the users on the Action Agenda platform; and (b) criteria for the Action Agenda.

#### **Enhancing the users on the Action Agenda platform**

30. Some submissions recommended activities that the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity could undertake to enhance non-state actors as users on the Action Agenda platform. The recommendations included the need for: (a) the Action Agenda to include more languages; (b) promote the open source components of all the features of the Action Agenda to be in external partners' websites;<sup>5</sup> (c) make available commitments offline at a local level; (d) non-state actors in workshops and UNEP-GEF projects with information about the Action Agenda platforms and the BCH platform; (e) profile non-state actors in social media platforms, including YouTube and blogs; (f) profile non-state actors in meetings (e.g. side events and online discussions); (g) expand the FAQ; (h) make use of existing information-sharing measures to raise awareness of the Action Agenda; (i) hold online discussions on different themes; (j) enhance educational activities; and (k) add on the pledge forms, projects on capacity-building and/or linkage to the NBSAPs. Some submissions also provided information of the main features of the new Action Agenda landing page that was most useful and easier to access information (e.g. infographics, flyers, videos).

#### **Criteria for the Action Agenda**

31. Most submissions highlighted that the draft implementation plan for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was important as key criteria for the Action Agenda, including: (a) the capacity-building plan for the Protocol; (b) the BCH III project to support the Cartagena Protocol. Some submissions also highlighted the Global Biodiversity Framework as important for the criteria, including commitments towards addressing the drivers of biodiversity loss, the shift towards nature-positive solutions, mainstream and integrate biodiversity in all relevant economic sectors and national policies.

### **Theme 4: Monitoring, reporting and evaluation of progress of commitments**

32. Under Theme 4 on monitoring, reporting and evaluation of progress of commitments, inputs provided by participants included: (a) participation for monitoring and evaluation; and (b) reporting of commitments.

#### **Participation for monitoring and evaluation**

33. A few submissions noted the importance of monitoring, reporting and evaluation of progress of commitments in the Action Agenda. The main inputs included: (a) major groups, such as indigenous peoples and local communities including women and youth, should be part of full and effective participation in the decision-making process regarding LMOs; (b) building capacity through credibility and transparency in biosafety systems; (c) sharing of guidance materials; and (d) non-state actors measurable impacts across the supply chain, operations, transportation and production through active participation and building synergies to promote collaboration with governments and stakeholders. In this regard, enhanced concrete and measurable biosafety commitments could be made and evaluated.

#### **Reporting of commitments**

34. Some other details were also provided, including that non-state actors could report on their progress in implementing the draft Implementation Plan for the Protocol and the draft Global Biodiversity

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<sup>5</sup> The open source components are available at <https://scbd.github.io/action-agenda-components/>

Framework (e.g. impact assessments, result analysis and policy implementation, meeting timelines and addressing target audience(s)).

### **ONLINE DISCUSSION GROUP 3: SHARING INFORMATION OF THE ACTION AGENDA AND ITS COMMITMENTS**

#### **Theme 5: Existing information-sharing measure**

35. Under Theme 5 on existing information-sharing measures, 8 inputs were provided by participants. The major inputs include: (a) profiling and information-sharing measures and challenges; and (b) national biosafety websites and the BCH Platform.

#### **Profiling and information-sharing measures and challenges**

36. Participants highlighted some profiling and information-sharing measures on the Action Agenda website and the social media platforms that are good to make use. Some of the main tools were videos, web stories, infographics, social media postings, flyers and articles.

37. In the light of that, participants also highlighted challenges in developing countries regarding Internet connectivity and financial resources. Some details entailed to: (a) develop and print brochures to indigenous peoples and local communities; (b) provide more languages of online and offline materials; (c) provide more capacity-building; (d) Governments providing part of their financial resources to non-state actors (e.g. cities, NGOs, IPLCs) for them to help implement policies and customary systems of IPLCs.

#### **National biosafety websites and the BCH Platform**

38. With regard to the use of national biosafety websites and the BCH Platform, there were a few submissions noting these information-sharing measures. Some of the inputs suggested that NGOs, educational institutions, and regulatory bodies mostly made use of the national websites. Other inputs suggested that the private sector, including seed producers and farmers, should use the biosafety website more in the future. Many submissions noted the importance of the BCH Platform (the new BCH Platform launched on 29 November 2021) and the sharing of biosafety information, in particular on risk assessments of LMOs, and that information is actively shared so that non-state actors can access relevant information. The components mostly used by respondents were the FAQ, online discussions, databases, guidance materials and statistics. Some noted the importance to for the BCH to be available in the six official languages of the United Nations.

#### **Theme 6: Opportunities for information-sharing measures**

39. Under Theme 6 on opportunities for information-sharing measures, there were 20 inputs from participants. The main outcomes included: (a) identified biosafety messages; (b) entry points for information-sharing of the Action Agenda; and (c) support for commitments.

#### **Messages**

40. Participants highlighted main biosafety impactful messages. Some of these were based on: (a) maximizing the benefits and minimizing potential risks of biotechnology (Agenda 21), including linking biosafety to the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity; (b) modern biotechnology has great potential for human well-being if developed and used with adequate safety measures (Preamble to the CPB text); (c) messages linked to the Sustainable Development Goals; (d) biosafety protecting biodiversity, including a focus on conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity (Some submissions also noted that messages should be concise and focused); and (e) Information on the importance of effective, transparent, and evidence-based risk assessments of LMOs.

#### *Entry points*

41. Some of the entry points that were highlighted by submissions were to make available the Action Agenda information, in public hearings, workshops, educational events, online seminars, townhall

meetings, media, associations/coalitions, local governments, including townhall meetings, and social media as well as local, national, regional and international platforms and events. It was also noted that translations in the six official languages of the United Nations would enhance commitments.

*Support for commitments*

42. Respondents also highlighted that some relevant support needs to be provided to non-state actors to facilitate progress of commitments and sharing their work. Many submissions noted that establishing focal points within the non-state actor with contact information for other non-state actors would be key to provide advice on policies to non-state actors. Another suggestion was to have guidelines on participation in meetings and for non-state actors to make meaningful inputs.

43. Many noted that capacity-building, information-sharing and awareness raising are needed through different means (e.g. BCH III projects, workshops, training of regional advisors, guidelines on participating in SCBD-related meetings, training programs, townhall meetings, campaigns, field visits such as to farmers and indigenous peoples and local communities, women and youth).

44. Other support to make commitments were: (a) either national governmental or non-state actors providing support to indigenous peoples and local communities; (b) funding for academia; (c) making use of the Almaty Amendment to the Aarhus Convention as key guidelines to support non-state actors; (d) competent national authorities partnerships with other organizations for capacity-building and information dissemination; (e) the Asia Biosafety Clearing House “Family” (ABF), regional BCH platform, facilitating awareness to countries and providing capacity-building projects; and (f) BCH interoperability.

45. Some submissions also highlighted how the Action Agenda could support the sharing of information and commitments on biosafety in three years. The key point from submissions was to make a commitment on the Action Agenda, including that it could be more interactive, support biosafety education and have more measurable deliverables in the coming three years. It was generally agreed that major campaigns and integrated initiatives with partners and other stakeholders are needed. This would entail with organizations (e.g. CGIAR), high-level meetings or side events with ministries (e.g. environment, agriculture, transportation, United Nations General Assembly), high profile organizations, and private-public partnerships.

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