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REGIONAL AND SUBREGIONAL APPROACHES TO CAPACITY-BUILDING AND COOPERATION IN BIOSAFETY: A REVIEW OF ISSUES, EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM RELEVANT CASE STUDIES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of Parties to the Protocol (COP-MOP), in its various decisions, has urged Parties and other governments to cooperate in the implementation of the Protocol. In decision BS-III/3, the Parties to the Protocol adopted an updated capacity-building Action Plan, which identifies "scientific, technical and institutional collaboration at sub regional, regional and international levels" as one of the priority elements that Parties need to address. The Action Plan outlines a number of specific activities that can be undertaken to foster such collaboration at the regional level. These include the establishment of: regional websites and databases, mechanisms for coordination and harmonization of biosafety frameworks, regional and subregional collaborative arrangements, regional workshops and training programmes, regional advisory mechanisms, regional centres of excellence and training and strengthening of South-South cooperation.

2. In decision BS-III/3, paragraph 10, Parties and other Governments are also invited to coordinate and harmonize biosafety frameworks at the regional and subregional levels. In paragraph 11(d) of the decision, they are further invited to promote bilateral exchanges of technical experts between countries as well as encourage bilateral or regional cooperation. In addition, paragraph 16 invites developed country Parties, other Governments and relevant organizations to assist developing country Parties to build their capacity to establish and implement biosafety coordination mechanisms at the national and regional levels in order to promote synergies between existing capacity-building initiatives.

3. Furthermore, in decision BS-III/2, paragraph 6, Governments and other users are encouraged to develop national, regional, subregional and institutional nodes that are interlinked and interoperable with the Central Portal of the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH), as appropriate. In paragraph 8 of decision BS-II/2, they are also encouraged to cooperate particularly in the following areas: improved capacity for data collection and data management at the national level, strengthening of core human resources at the national level, and the establishment of appropriate infrastructure to share information at national, regional and international levels.

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4. At the second Coordination Meeting for Governments and Organizations Implementing or Funding Biosafety Capacity-Building Activities, held in Tromsø in January 2006, participants agreed to discuss the issue of regional and subregional approaches to capacity-building in biosafety at the third meeting. It was noted that regional and subregional approaches can assist countries with limited resources to develop joint capacity-building programmes for addressing common needs and priorities.

5. This paper has been prepared to assist participants in their deliberations. The paper reviews relevant initiatives and programmes that promote regional and subregional cooperation in capacity-building. It synthesizes relevant experiences and lessons learned from those initiatives that could be useful in fostering capacity-building in biosafety at the regional and subregional levels. The paper also reviews the issues and challenges that were encountered and how they were addressed. Finally, the paper presents, in annex II, some proposals that could provide a basis for developing guidelines to assist Parties, other Governments and relevant organizations in promoting regional cooperation and approaches to capacity-building in biosafety, taking into account national circumstances and priorities.

II. THE RATIONALE FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION IN BIOSAFETY

6. Regional cooperation is a vital mechanism for the effective implementation of the Protocol. 1/ This is particularly important in view of the fact that the Protocol addresses the transboundary movement of living modified organisms (LMOs). A number of provisions in the Protocol call for cooperation among Parties. For example, Article 22 of the Protocol, on capacity-building, requires Parties to "cooperate in the development and/or strengthening of human resources and institutional capacities in biosafety…including through existing global, regional, subregional and national institutions and organizations and, as appropriate, through facilitating private sector involvement". It states that such cooperation includes scientific and technical training in the proper and safe management of biotechnology, and the use of risk assessment and risk management for biosafety and the enhancement of technological and institutional capacities in biosafety.

7. Furthermore, Article 16, on risk management, urges Parties to cooperate with a view to identifying LMOs or specific traits of LMOs that may have adverse effects on biodiversity and taking appropriate measures regarding the treatment of such LMOs or specific traits. As well, Article 17 requires Parties to take appropriate measures to notify affected or potentially affected States when it knows of an occurrence under its jurisdiction resulting in a release that leads, or may lead, to an unintentional transboundary movement of an LMO that is likely to have significant adverse effects on biodiversity, taking also into account risks to human health in such States. It also calls for consultation with such Parties to enable them to determine appropriate responses and initiate necessary action, including emergency measures. In addition, Article 26 encourages Parties to "cooperate on research and information exchange on any socio-economic impacts of living modified organisms, especially on indigenous and local communities". Finally, Parties are required to cooperate in exchanging key information relevant to the implementation of the Protocol, through the Biosafety Clearing-House.

8. Cooperation between countries with respect to biosafety, particularly between neighbouring countries, is therefore crucial in order to effectively regulate the movements of LMOs across national boundaries. This can help minimize illegal and/or unintentional transboundary movements of living modified organisms, for example through regular exchange of information, joint surveillance and detection of LMOs and consistent application of biosafety regulatory frameworks and guidelines and standards for the import and release of LMOs under the jurisdiction of one country. In this regard, cooperation can minimise potential damage of LMOs to the biodiversity of other countries in the region.

1/ Regional initiatives include undertakings in two or more countries within a region or subregion and involve regular interaction among the participating countries. The term "regional" as used in the paper refers to both "regional" and "subregional" initiatives.

9. Furthermore, regional cooperation is imperative with respect to capacity-building in biosafety, especially for countries with limited resources and expertise. Biosafety is a highly technical field which typically requires high initial investments for building the necessary institutional infrastructure (including: laboratories, greenhouses and research materials for risk assessment or LMO testing and identification) and human resources capacity. Cooperation can enable countries, which have common needs and priorities and face similar circumstances, to pool together resources and tap each other's experience, expertise and infrastructural capacities. A number of publications and forums have also highlighted the benefits of adopting regional cooperation and approaches to capacity-building. These include: the economies of scale arising from pooling resources for joint programmes, the advantages of coordinated and coherent action, the sharing of information and experiences and the building of mutual interdependence. Moreover, regional initiatives and mechanisms can promote complementarity of efforts and ensure more efficient use of available resources (including human, technical and financial resources).

10. However, the translation of these ideals into concrete initiatives has so far been limited, especially in the area of biosafety. There is a need for conscious and systematic efforts to scale-up regional cooperation and coordination in order to assist countries in building their capacities in biosafety. A number of opportunities exist for regional cooperation at policy and technical levels and also at institutional and individual levels. This paper reviews the experiences and lessons learned from relevant ongoing or completed initiatives, which would help to guide efforts to enhance such cooperation.

III. REGIONAL AND SUBREGIONAL CAPACITY-BUILDING INITIATIVES IN BIOSAFETY: A REVIEW OF EXPERIENCES, BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

11. A few regional and subregional biosafety capacity-building initiatives (projects, programmes and networks), as well as global programmes with regional components have been developed and implemented over the last decade. Examples of ongoing and recently completed regional initiatives are outlined in annex II below. These have involved different mechanisms, approaches and activities including: regional and subregional biosafety policy dialogue and training workshops; sharing of information and experiences in the development of national biosafety frameworks and learning from each other's institutional practices and procedures; harmonization of biosafety regulations and guidelines; joint biosafety research; and regional partnership building through various regional forums and exchange programs. The review below covers one case study from each of the four regions (Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and Central and Eastern Europe) and one global project – the UNEP-GEF project on the development of national biosafety frameworks.

A. The East African Regional Programme and Research Network for Biotechnology, Biosafety and Biotechnology Policy Development (BIO-EARN)

12. BIO-EARN is primarily a network of various government departments, universities and research institutes in four Eastern African countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and United Republic of Tanzania) and Sweden. One of its principal objectives is to promote regional collaboration in building capacities and competence in Eastern Africa through training and formal education, institutional strengthening, and policy and networking support through biotechnology-policy related workshops at regional and national levels. More than 120 regulatory officials, scientists and policy makers have been trained in biosafety through seminars, regional workshops and short-term international training courses. The programme has also trained six MSc and 20 PhD students. BIO-EARN has also facilitated communication and dialogue between high-level policy makers and scientists in the region through national awareness seminars and site visits, resulting in increased collaboration and sharing of knowledge and experiences in the region. Furthermore, the programme provided research equipment and IT infrastructure and Internet access to

partner research institutions and national focal points. A number of publications were also produced and disseminated, e.g. the Biosafety Resource Book on Risk Assessment and Risk Management. 2/

13. The programme is coordinated through the Regional Coordination Office housed at the Inter University Council of East Africa (IUCEA). The other components of its management structure include the Governing Board (GB), the Programme Advisory Committee (PAC) and the Implementing Institutions. The role of the Governing Council is to oversee and make decisions on the general direction of the Programme and ensure integration and harmonization with national activities. The Programme Advisory Committee gives technical guidance to the programme, evaluates the Programme Research Fund project proposals and advises the Governing Board and Regional Coordination Office on various programme implementation issues.

14. The BIO-EARN programme has stimulated and facilitated regional collaboration, networking and the sharing of information through a number of mechanisms. These include: regional seminars and workshops, steering committee meetings and the interaction among the PhD students. The BIO-EARN documents, website and newsletters have also played a big role in fostering close coordination and collaboration among the programme partners.

Lessons learned

15. Some of the lessons learned with respect to regional cooperation include the following:

(a) Regional cooperation in biosafety is essential because of major investments required in terms of training and establishment institutional and technological infrastructure (including: equipment and consumables for laboratories and greenhouses);

(b) Improved communication between scientists and policy makers is essential in order to maximise the use of scientific findings in policy formulation and decision-making processes;

(c) E-mail, Internet-based communication and face-to-face meetings are all important tools for enhancing communication and collaboration. The successful use of these tools, however, depends on the personal interest and commitment of the different stakeholders to collaborate and tackle communication hurdles;

(d) In order for a regional programme such as BIO-EARN to succeed, the political commitment at the regional, national and institutional levels is essential. As well, in order to create a greater ownership in the region, the process of developing and implementing initiatives must be participatory;

(e) It is important to set clear and realistic objectives, taking into account the objectives and activities of other related initiatives in the region, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication, competition and waste of resources. It is also important to agree on the national and regional priorities and find a clear niche for a given regional programme vis-à-vis other relevant initiatives;

(f) In general, establishment of a coherent programme structure is essential in order to foster transparency in management, generate support for decisions and facilitate smooth operation of a regional programme. It is also important to design governance and management structures that clarify the roles of all players and identify clearly the decision-making responsibilities at various levels;

2/ For further details, see: Evaluation Report of the BIO-EARN Programme (Sida Evaluation 04/09) available at: http://www.asdi.org/sida/jsp/sida.jsp?d=118&a=3168 and a synthesis report on BIO-EARN's impacts during phase II (2002-2005) available at: http://www.bio-earn.org/report_impact_synthesis_sep_06.htm.

(g) Strong leadership and governance at the programme coordinator and institutional levels (including: sufficient decision-making power and the ability to take initiative and resolve problems) are crucial elements for the success of a complex regional programme. In the case of BIO-EARN, a strong steering committee and competent coordinators contributed very much to the success of the programme;

B. Biosafety-related regional activities of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)

16. The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has undertaken a number of regional initiatives to ensure the safe transboundary movement and use of agriculture-related genetically modified organisms in its member countries. In an attempt to enhance harmonization of national laws and regulations pertaining to biosafety, the ASEAN Ministers for Agriculture and Forestry adopted, in 1999, the ASEAN Guidelines on Risk Assessment of Agriculture-Related Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). 3/ The guidelines provide a common framework for the assessment of risks associated with the transboundary movement of agriculture-related GMOs and for taking decisions relating to the release of agriculture-related GMOs in ASEAN member countries.

17. ASEAN member countries are building up their capabilities to undertake risk assessments and to detect GMOs. An ASEAN Regional Workshop on Biosafety of GMOs was held April 2000 in Kuala Lumpur and identified a number of specific needs for the ASEAN region with regard to risk assessment and the management of GMOs. Furthermore, four regional training workshops on the safety and risk assessment of agriculture-related GMOs organized by the ASEAN and the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) were conducted in July 2001, August 2002, August 2003 and September 2004. 4/

18. In order to develop the important aspects of regulating GMOs, in 2003, the ASEAN ministers for agriculture and forestry endorsed the establishment of the ASEAN Genetically Modified Food Testing Network. The aim of the Network is to assist ASEAN member countries better utilize existing national resources on genetic modification and food safety, as well as gain better access to information on developing GM-testing capabilities for food. The network links various laboratories within ASEAN member countries. In August 2004, a task force was established to steer the network, synergize efforts in GMO training programmes and establish networking links with other agencies that conduct capacity-building activities in biosafety in Asia. Through the network, reference methods and materials for use in GM-food testing in the ASEAN countries are validated. Training programmes, involving the sharing of resources and exchange of expertise from within the ASEAN, were also established.

19. The development of biosafety in the ASEAN region is mainly impeded by the shortage of human resources and skills as well as insufficient and poor infrastructure. Many ASEAN countries also do not have policy and regulatory systems on GMOs in place and lack the capacity to develop national nodes of the Biosafety Clearing-House. In this regard, a report prepared for the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in 2001 recommended that ASEAN member countries should work together and develop expertise to strengthen their capacities in policy and decision-making; development of biosafety legal frameworks, biosafety regulatory systems and risk assessment, data management and information sharing systems, including the establishment of Biosafety Clearing-House nodes. It was noted that this would facilitate and enhanced cooperation amongst the ASEAN member countries. The report also recommended that collaborative efforts should be taken in the preparation of documentation and information packages in various formats to meet the needs of different target audiences in order to reduce duplication of effort and ensure efficient use of resources. Furthermore, the report called for:

3/ The guidelines can be accessed at: http://www.aseansec.org/6226.htm

4/ Copies of the workshop reports can be accessed at: http://www.aseansec.org/4921.htm

(a) Promotion of coordination among Governments on biosafety, particularly with regard to research work on releases of GMOs, data management and information sharing, including the sharing of case studies;

(b) Harmonization of biosafety standards and protocols; and

(c) Development of a regional website or Biosafety Clearing-House nodes to enhance the sharing of information, including: best practice guidelines on regulatory communications, peer-reviewed information materials, detection methods for living modified organisms, as well as internship and training opportunities.

Experiences and lessons learned

20. From the various ASEAN biosafety-related activities, the following lessons and observations have been made: 5/

(a) The sharing of experiences through the ASEAN network provides opportunities for building synergies and enables countries to address biosafety issues in a cost effective manner;

(b) In view of the fact that the agricultural systems and products of most ASEAN member countries are similar in nature, developments in biotechnology and biosafety are likely to have similar impacts. Accordingly, a coordinated approach in this area is necessary;

(c) The harmonization of national biosafety regulations and the risk assessment and risk management procedures is important in order to ensure that GMOs imported or developed in one country do not adversely impact the biological diversity of other countries in the region. Such harmonization would also create the opportunity for ASEAN member countries to share resources and expertise and thus minimise duplication and wastage of resources;

(d) There is a need for open communication between the various regulatory agencies to ensure that tasks can be completed expeditiously. Exchange of information is also crucial in order to understand the requirements of each country and to keep pace with new knowledge and experiences gained;

(e) It is important for the ASEAN to apply appropriate policy and management tools and to build both technological capacity and management capabilities to regulate GMOs import and use. While capacity building is very much a local issue, regional cooperation can help accelerate the process.

C. Regional project of the Organization of American States (OAS) on "Biosafety regulations in Latin America and the Caribbean within the framework of the international Biosafety Protocol"

21. This project was initiated in March 2002 with the aim to strengthen national capacities to implement the Biosafety Protocol through building skills for the assessment and management of risks of biotechnology products (GMOs) and promotion of public awareness of the risks and benefits of GMOs. The project also aimed at facilitating coordination of actions among participating countries for better implementation of the Protocol at a regional level. The main project activities included: assessment of the existing and required legal and institutional capacities, identification of the training needs and organization of national and regional training biosafety seminars and workshops. The first phase of the project (2002-

5/ See report on ASEAN biosafety activities at: http://www.croplifeasia.org/ref_library/biotechnology/Unido_GMO_Biosafety_report.pdf (pages 26-28).

project (2002-2003) was initiated in Chile, Colombia and Peru and second phase (2003-2004) covered six other countries: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Grenada, Jamaica, Panama, and Trinidad and Tobago.

22. The project was designed in such a way as to promote both North-South and South-South cooperation. It facilitated collaboration and the exchange of knowledge and experience through roundtable discussions involving international experts and national experts. The latter included representatives of regulatory and academic institutions, business enterprises, non-governmental organizations and members of Congress. It also fostered linkages between relevant institutions. Furthermore, the project promoted coordinated and systematic biosafety training in the region. 6/

23. The main lessons learned from this project include the following:

(a) Biosafety is a new and rapidly evolving discipline. There are very few experts in this field within the Latin America and the Caribbean region. Therefore, region-wide training in different biosafety subjects is of the utmost importance; 7/

(b) It is important to establish national and regional biosafety information networks, consisting of public and private sector institutions and universities, in order to foster the sharing of information, knowledge and experiences;

(c) Communicators should be actively involved in biosafety processes and activities in order to transmit the information in a way that can be easily understood by the different stakeholders and the general public. In this regard, it is also necessary to elaborate a communication strategy;

(d) In order for national and regional biosafety systems to be effective, relevant information must be provided to key stakeholders and the public, especially information regarding the role, tasks and responsibility of both officers and decision makers and the established mechanisms for public participation. In the development of this project, communication channels were opened with decision-makers so as to facilitate the exchange of up-to-date scientific and technical information needed to support the implementation of biosafety policies, legislation and decision-making;

(e) North-South cooperation and South-South cooperation, especially at the regional level, is essential in order to maximize the use of existing experiences, human resources and physical infrastructure. This is particularly important for countries with similar needs and circumstances. Those countries should explore a suitable regional biosafety model, which might include standardization of the regulatory procedures and guidelines for evaluation of LMOs so as to minimise costs for experimental trials, which could constitute a barrier to the development of LMOs in the region.

24. While the OAS biosafety project opened new opportunities for cooperation in biosafety at a regional level in Latin America and the Caribbean, the experience gained from the project could also serve as a model for capacity-building in other regions.

D. Dutch Matra-funded Project on "Implementation of national biosafety frameworks in pre-accession countries of Central and Eastern Europe" (1999-2002)

6/ See article in the *Electronic Journal of Biotechnology*; vol. 7 No. 1, issue of April 15, 2004 at: http://www.ejbiotechnology.info/content/vol7/issue1/full/6/index.html

7/ Training is needed in different subjects including: risk assessment and risk management, molecular and phenotypic characterization of LMOs, interaction between LMOs and the environment, biosafety of GM microorganisms, as well as the social, economic and legal aspects of LMOs.

25. This project was initiated in 1999 following a request from 10 countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) that were planning to join the European Union. The project was funded by the "Matra" program of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was implemented by the Dutch Ministry for the Environment.

26. The overall objective of the project was to support pre-accession countries in establishing workable and transparent national biosafety frameworks in conformity with the relevant EC directives and other international obligations such as the Biosafety Protocol.

27. The project involved national and regional-level activities. National activities included detailed stocktaking analysis of the national biosafety frameworks and 'hands on' training workshops in risk assessment, the handling of requests, public information and regulatory enforcement. The workshops were conducted by trainers/ experts from Europe, North America and international organisations.

28. The regional activities aimed at ensuring sustainability of the results of the project through strengthening regional collaboration which was realised through the following activities:

(a) Organization of annual regional expert meetings to exchange information and experiences;

(b) Conduct of regional training workshops on regulations, risk assessment, public information and enforcement;

(c) Establishment of a Regional Steering Committee to provide policy guidance on the implementation of the project and finding means of fostering regional collaboration;

(d) Strengthening of the regional and subregional centres of excellence in order to provide technical support to countries in the region; and

(e) Establishment of a CEE regional website to facilitate exchange of information on national biosafety frameworks and regional activities.

29. The project also involved a series of outreach activities aimed at ensuring that the project was implemented in line with up-to-date international knowledge and practices. This was achieved through seeking collaboration with experts from other countries and organisations and through external "peer reviews". The project also invited observers from other non-CEE to participate in its training workshops.

30. Some of the "good practices" adopted by this project include the following:

(a) Detailed stocktaking analysis before starting the project activities, which proved very useful;

(b) Support and training by experts with relevant expertise and substantial experience in the field of biosafety;

(c) Use of trainers from different countries who presented different approaches;

(d) Permanent availability of experts who responded promptly, by either phone or e-mail, to questions from the participating countries;

(e) Active involvement of law makers in the workshops (for example in Bulgaria a seminar was requested by a parliamentary committee);

(f) Close collaboration with relevant international organisations;

(g) Emphasis on regional and subregional collaborative activities and approaches.

(h) Repeated training with practical dossiers of previous LMO import or release applications.

31. By the end of the project, arrangements for follow-up activities were in place. Some of initiatives were funded by Sweden and Finland to continue the project activities in the Baltic countries. The project demonstrated the need to build and strengthen national and subregional capacity to assess and manage environmental and feed/food safety hazards as well as the socio-economic impacts of transgenic crops. Such capacity is vital for enabling public institutions at the national and subregional levels make informed decisions as to the benefits and risks of trade and production of transgenic crops. It is also necessary to assist them in determining where, when, and how these crops and their food and feed products may be best utilized to contribute to national development priorities while ensuring compliance with the Protocol.

E. The GEF Initial Strategy on Biosafety and the UNEP-GEF Global Project on Development of National Biosafety Frameworks

32. In November 2000, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council adopted a GEF Initial Strategy for Assisting Countries to Prepare for the Entry into Force of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The main objectives of the strategy were to: (a) assist countries in the establishment of national biosafety frameworks; (b) promote information sharing and collaboration, especially at the regional and subregional level; and (c) promote collaboration with other organizations to assist capacity-building for the Protocol.

33. The Initial Strategy emphasized regional and subregional objectives and activities. It stated that:

> "National biosafety decisions and activities need to take into account legislative measures and biosafety regulatory systems of adjacent countries. Subregional cooperation in information sharing and harmonizing legal and regulatory instruments is crucial for effective management of transfer of LMOs across borders. Information to assist countries in decision making is not necessarily available within a single country. Maximizing the use of institutional, financial, technical and human resources within a region will enhance a country's ability to implement the Protocol and will facilitate an exchange of best practices and experiences (GEF 2000)."

34. Specific regional and subregional activities identified in the strategy included the following:

(a) Establishment of a roster of experts in a transparent manner and modalities for including them in national, subregional and/or regional networks;

(b) Assessment of options for the implementation of various elements of the biosafety;

(c) Identification of opportunities for harmonizing regulatory frameworks, identifying regional expertise, and exchanging information regarding initiatives in priority areas for capacity building.

(d) Undertake a survey on existing mechanisms for harmonization of risk assessment/ risk management procedures and identify subregional priorities to enhance existing capacities and expertise;

(e) Organization of subregional workshops, among others, to:

(i) Identify subregional priorities to enhance existing capacities and expertise;

(ii) Discuss ways to collaborate in utilizing human resources and relevant expertise and to provide mechanisms for sharing national experiences;

(iii) Provide information leading to the harmonization of procedures for the assessment and management of risks and benefits of living modified organisms and review of applications for field trials and field releases;

(iv) Ensure complementarity and coordination with the capacity building efforts of individual governments and other international, bilateral and multi-lateral agencies.

(v) Encourage and enable the development of opportunities for regional collaboration;

(f) Establish systems needed for risk assessment, audit of risk assessments and risk management, taking into account national and sub regional/regional needs; and

(g) Provide appropriate mechanisms for sharing scientific assessments, developing mutual acceptance of data and ensuring data validation at subregional levels.

35. The evaluation report of the GEF Support for Biosafety, which was carried out in 2005, noted that the UNEP-GEF project promoted regional cooperation through a series of regional and subregional workshops. 8/ These facilitated the building of networks and the sharing of information and experiences. Cooperation was also promoted through the establishment of contacts and working relations with existing regional and subregional organisations and the exchange of expertise and experiences among neighbouring countries or countries with similar legal and institutional systems.

36. During the above-mentioned evaluation, potential mechanisms and approaches for encouraging regional cooperation were recommended. These include: direct bilateral exchanges of technical experts between countries, information and experience exchange regional workshops, training of trainers in technical aspects of biosafety and joint training of border control and customs officers among countries sharing borders. It was suggested that these approaches should be addressed through existing regional bodies and mechanisms.

37. One of the key lessons learned from the project was that: "Regional cooperation cannot be imposed by an external entity. Countries will move from isolation to collaboration at their own pace, and out of their own needs and understanding of the possible benefits of sharing with trusted partners". 9/

38. The Evaluation of the GEF Support for Biosafety noted that regional cooperation with respect to the coordination of capacity-building activities and the harmonization of scientific, legal, and regulatory instruments was very limited. It recommended that the GEF should actively seek to integrate national support with regional collaboration where appropriate. In this regard, it further recommended that continued GEF support should be provided for regional and subregional awareness-raising workshops and for establishment/strengthening of regional centres of excellence.

39. The new Strategy for Financing Biosafety, which was adopted by the GEF Council in December 2006, also emphasizes regional and subregional approaches. It states that regional approaches may be used to address specific needs of countries within a region, especially where stocktaking assessments

8/ A copy of the evaluation report can be accessed at: http://gefweb.org/Documents/Council_Documents/GEF_C28/documents/GEFME_C28-Inf1-Biosafety.pdf

9/ See case study report on the experiences of the UNEP-GEF project on development of national biosafety frameworks available at: http://www.unep.ch/biosafety/development/devdocuments/UNEPGEFstudyVersion170605.pdf

identify the potential for coordinating biosafety frameworks, for exchange of regional expertise, and responding to common priority capacity building needs.

IV. STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING REGIONAL AND SUBREGIONAL APPROACHES TO CAPACITY-BUILDING IN BIOSAFETY: A SYNTHESIS OF BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

40. From the foregoing case-study review, the following general principles, strategies and best practices for promoting regional cooperation can be drawn:

(a) *Setting clear and realistic objectives and priorities*: It is important to set clear and realistic objectives so as not to create false expectations. This priority setting process should take into account the objectives and activities of other related initiatives in the region in order to ensure complementarity. It is also important for the various stakeholders to find agreement on the national and regional objectives and to ensure that they respond to the identified needs and priorities;

(b) *Adopting a demand-driven approach*: Regional cooperation initiatives should be home-grown, demand-driven and responsive to the needs and circumstances of the participating countries. Regional cooperation should not be imposed by any external entity. Countries will move from isolation to collaboration at their own pace, and out of their own needs and understanding of the possible benefits of sharing with trusted partners;

(c) *Focusing on regional activities with added-value*: Priority should be given to issues or needs that can be best addressed through regional-level collaborative interventions and avoid duplicating efforts that can be better implemented at the national levels;

(d) *Producing tangible benefits:* Experience shows that a regional cooperation program cannot be sustained unless the participating countries visualize tangible benefits from the cooperation activities which have added-value to the national efforts. Demonstrating the benefits of cooperation within a reasonable time framework is critically important. Successful implementation of fruitful regional cooperation activities will enhance trust and confidence and strengthen political support for subregional and regional cooperation. Long "gestation" periods usually reduce the momentum of cooperation among the participating countries;

(e) *Securing strong political commitment*: Strong high-level political support and commitment by all stakeholders at the regional, national, institutional and individual levels are critical factors in advancing regional cooperation;

(f) *Encouraging participatory stakeholder involvement*: The involvement of key stakeholders in relevant regional cooperation activities is very important in order to create a sense of ownership of the regional cooperation activities. The process of developing regional initiatives should be participatory;

(g) *Establishing clear and transparent governance and management structures*: The roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders should be clearly defined, coupled with the establishment of clear decision-making structures and procedures. Coherent institutional structures, including core teams or working groups, are also essential for ensuring transparency and effectiveness in management, generating support for decisions and increasing efficiency of operations;

(h) *Maximizing and strengthening existing bodies and structures*: Regional initiatives should effectively utilise and strengthen existing institutional structures and mechanisms. They should avoid creating new parallel structures. This would help ensure the efficient use of resources and avoid overlaps;

(i) *Promoting synergies with relevant initiatives*: Efforts should be made to identify and promote interlinkages, synergies and complementarity with other relevant initiatives in order to minimize duplication of efforts, competition and wastage of resources;

(j) *Establishing effective leadership*: Strong leadership is critical to the success of regional cooperation initiatives. It is therefore important to have a lead government agency or regional body to champion an initiative and to mobilize other countries and organizations in order to secure their commitment;

(k) *Promoting effective communication and networking*: Open and regular communication between various stakeholders is critical for achieving effective regional cooperation. This, however, requires commitment at both individual and institutional levels. Recent developments in information communication technologies, such as e-mail, the Internet and Internet-based discussions forums, listservers and networks provide useful tools for facilitating communication and networking. Regular regional forums, dialogue meetings and workshops for different stakeholders and experts can also greatly facilitate communication and the sharing of information, knowledge and experiences. It is also necessary to elaborate a communication strategy.

41. The above-outlined strategies and practices which are based on the experience and lessons learned from different case studies, provide a good basis for developing operational guidelines to assist Parties, other Governments and relevant organizations in their efforts to develop and implement regional initiatives and mechanisms for capacity-building in biosafety. Participants may wish to review and build upon those strategies in order develop recommendations that may be used by Parties, other Governments and relevant organizations.

V. CONCLUSION

42. The role of regional and subregional approaches to capacity-building in biosafety cannot be overemphasized. As stated in Article 22 of the Protocol, Parties need to cooperate in the development and/or strengthening of human resources and institutional capacities in biosafety, including biotechnology to the extent that it is required for biosafety, for the purpose of the effective implementation of the Protocol.

43. Many biosafety issues transcend national boundaries. As such, cooperation between countries, whether through regional projects, regional workshops and training programmes, regional advisory mechanisms, and information networks or regional "centers of excellence", is imperative. For countries with limited resources, regional cooperation is a realistic option for accessing and gradually building the necessary capacities for the effective implementation of the Protocol.

44. This document has highlighted a number of experiences and lessons that could assist Parties, other governments and relevant organisation in developing and implementing or strengthening regional initiatives and mechanisms for capacity-building in biosafety. Participants are invited to consider the information provided in the foregoing review and formulate recommendations and guidelines, on the basis of the draft guidelines provided in annex I, for consideration by the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, which will be held in May 2008 in Bonn.

Annex I

DRAFT GUIDANCE FOR PROMOTING REGIONAL APPROACHES TO CAPACITY-BUILDING IN BIOSAFETY

I. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

1. Article 22 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, on capacity-building, requires Parties to "cooperate in the development and/or strengthening of human resources and institutional capacities in biosafety (…) including through existing global, regional, subregional and national institutions and organizations and, as appropriate, through facilitating private sector involvement". It states that such cooperation includes scientific and technical training in the proper and safe management of biotechnology, and in the use of risk assessment and risk management for biosafety, and the enhancement of technological and institutional capacities in biosafety.

2. Many developing country Parties and Parties with economies in transition have major capacity-building needs and gaps and face serious challenges. They require significant investments in human resources development, institutional building and establishment of technological capacities in biosafety. Addressing those needs and challenges would clearly require a collaborative effort among all stakeholders, including both the private and public sectors, within and across countries. In this regard, enhancing regional cooperation is indispensable. However, this requires effective coordination, political commitment, systematic institution collaboration and coherent approaches.

3. The purpose of these guidelines is to assist Parties, other Governments and relevant organizations to catalyse, develop and/or strengthen regional initiatives and mechanisms for capacity-building in biosafety.

II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

4. Regional and subregional initiatives and cooperation should:

(a) Take into account needs and circumstances of the different participating countries;

(b) Set clear and realistic objectives and priorities;

(c) Focus on issues or needs that can be best addressed through regional-level collaborative interventions and avoid duplication of national efforts;

(d) Adopt a demand-driven approach;

(e) Focus on activities with added-value to national efforts;

(f) Produce tangible benefits;

(g) Secure strong political commitment;

(h) Encourage participatory stakeholder involvement;

(i) Establish clear and transparent governance and management structures;

(j) Maximize and strengthen existing bodies and structures;

(k) Promote synergies with relevant initiatives;

(l) Establish effective leadership;

(m) Promote effective communication and networking.

III. OPERATIONAL MODALITIES AND STRATEGIES

5. In order to achieve effective regional cooperation in biosafety, a number of operational strategies and mechanisms could be pursued. These include:

(a) Collaboration through regional initiatives (including projects and programmes);

(b) Enhancement of coordination and cooperation among relevant national government agencies in the formulation and implementation of policies and regional initiatives;

(c) Strengthening of mechanisms for fostering coordination and collaboration among different regional partners;

(d) Establishment of regional regulatory frameworks and procedures;

(e) Training and technical issues;

(f) Developing and testing best practices;

(g) Public education and awareness-raising;

(h) Sharing of information and knowledge and learning from each others' experiences, strengths and weaknesses;

(i) Exchange of experts, for example through short-term attachments, internships or fellowships;

(j) Testing and evaluation of safety at laboratory and experimental stages;

(k) Harmonization of regulatory frameworks and tools, including policies, guidelines and procedures.

IV. INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION IN BIOSAFETY

6. In view of the increasingly rapid developments in the field of biotechnology and biosafety, continuing policy guidance is required at both political and technical levels to address emerging issues and promote regional integration. This could be achieved through the establishment of institutional frameworks, such as regular regional conferences of ministers responsible for biosafety and/or regional technical working groups on biosafety. A few regional and subregional groupings have established such mechanisms. 10/ The functions of such an arrangement could include:

10/ Examples include: (i) the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and Biosafety (SACBB); (ii) the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) Regional Working Group on GMOs; and (iii) the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Ad-hoc Working Group of Experts on Biosafety.

(a) Identifying and articulating regional biosafety issues;

(b) Developing long-term regional policies/strategies;

(c) Developing and prioritizing regional action plans;

(d) Reviewing, monitoring, evaluating and coordinating programmes of regional development partner;

(e) Enhancing the momentum of regional cooperation and integration initiatives in biotechnology/biosafety;

(f) Resolving issues that are creating impediments to achieving regional visions and goals;

(g) Mobilizing resources and promoting public-private partnerships.

7. Other tools and mechanisms that can be employed to enhance regional and subregional cooperation in biosafety include the following:

(a) Use of existing regional bodies, including: United Nations regional economic commissions, 11/ regional and subregional economic integration organizations and regional research and development organizations or centres of excellence 12/ to help in fostering the exchange of information and expertise and undertaking regional activities in biosafety. Those organizations have experience in promoting regional cooperation in areas of mutual interest;

(b) Creation or strengthening of regional and subregional centres of excellence, which could be mobilized to support countries in the implementation of the Protocol;

(c) Establishment of regional Working Groups or coordinating Committees on biosafety;

(d) Creation of support networks at subregional and regional levels, coordinated by identified focal points, to facilitate collaboration, sharing of knowledge and experience and ongoing interaction between experts in the regions;

(e) Establishment of regional and subregional roster of biosafety experts to foster effective use of expertise from countries within particular regions, particularly countries with similar situations or similar legal and institutional systems;

(f) Exchange of experts in order to enhance professional cohesion among countries and organizations in a region;

(g) Establishment of regional biosafety information centres, databases or regional nodes of the Biosafety Clearing-House;

11/ The United Nations regional commissions include: the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

12/ Examples of regional economic integration organization include: the African Union (AU), European Union (EU), Organization of American States (OAS), ASEAN, SADC, etc. Regional research and development organizations include: Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) and the West and Central African Council for Research and Development (CORAF/WECARD).

(h) Publication of regional newsletters or appropriate information exchange tools and mechanisms to facilitate dissemination of regional news;

(i) Organization of regional and subregional seminars and workshops, which would provide useful forums for networking and sharing of experiences;

(j) Organization of regional courses, fellowships and study tours to enhance skills of biosafety policymakers and practitioners in a region;

(k) Exchange of experience in developing regional training and public awareness programmes;

(l) Development of exchange programmes with regional centres and institutions in other regions;

(m) Mobilization of funding for regional-level activities including training, exchange of scientists, conducting assessments and exchange of information, including where feasible, establishment of regional funds for technical cooperation in biosafety;

(n) Providing Funding option/opportunities for regional/subregional exchange of information and expertise at all levels (e.g. through provisions in projects, where countries are preparing NBF projects and demonstrations projects. The proposals can incorporate this element);

(o) Conduct of joint risk assessment, field monitoring of LMOs as well as policy analyses to demonstrate the applicability of regional approaches to biosafety regulations and practices and their added value;

(p) Development of regional policy frameworks, guidelines or operational procedures on common biosafety issues or themes relevant for the effective implementation of the Protocol.

8. Initiatives should also be developed to promote more effective and efficient use of existing infrastructure and expertise within the different regions, including enhanced cross-border exchange of experts and establishment of “one-stop shopping” facilities and information nodes.

Annex II

LIST OF ONGOING AND RECENTLY COMPLETED REGIONAL BIOSAFETY CAPACITY-BUILDING INITIATIVES

AFRICAN REGION

1. African Union (AU) project on Capacity Building for an Africa-wide Biosafety System – Ongoing since 2005 (http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/AUC/Departments/HRST/biosafety/AU_Biosafety.htm);

2. East African Regional Programme and Research Network for Biotechnology, Biosafety and Biotechnology Policy Development (BIO-EARN) – Ongoing since 1999 (http://www.bio-earn.org);

3. BiosafeTrain Project on Capacity Building for Biosafety and Ecological Impact Assessment of Transgenic Plants in East Africa – Ongoing since 2005 (http://www.biosafetrain.dk/Startpage/About_the_project.xml);

4. Eastern and Central Africa Biotechnology and Biosafety Programme (ECABIO) of the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) – Ongoing since 2003 (http://www.asareca.org/index.php?option=networks&Itemid=54#5);

5. NEPAD Biosciences eastern and central Africa (BecA) Initiative, spearheaded by the New Partnership for Africa 's Development (NEPAD) – Ongoing since 2003 (http://www.biosciencesafrica.org/BecA%20home.htm)

6. Southern African Biosafety and Environment Programme, implemented by the Regional Agricultural and Environmental Initiatives Network Africa (RAEIN-Africa) – Ongoing since 2004 (http://www.raein-africa.org/programms.htm)

ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

7. FAO Regional Project on Capacity Building in Biosafety of GM Crops in Asia (2002-2005): https://bch.biodiv.org/database/record.shtml?id=5655;

8. Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Biosafety-Related Activities – Ongoing (http://bch.biodiv.org/database/record.shtml?id=8508);

9. IUCN Regional Initiative on" Capacity Building to Implement the Biosafety Protocol in Asia" (http://www.rbp-iucn.lk/biosafety/MainPage.htm);

10. South Asia Biosafety Program (SABP), implemented by Agriculture & Biotechnology Strategies (AGBIOS) Canada – Ongoing since 2005 (http://www.agbios.com/sabp_main.php).

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

11. Dutch-Matra project on Implementation of Biosafety Frameworks in Pre-Accession Countries of Central and Eastern Europe (1999-2002): https://bch.biodiv.org/database/record.shtml?id=5112.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

12. OAS Project on Biosafety Regulations in Latin America and the Caribbean within the framework of the Biosafety Protocol, implemented by the Organization of American States (OAS) – Completed (http://bch.biodiv.org/database/record.shtml?id=5661);

13. United Nations University Biotechnology and Biosafety Program for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNU/BIOLAC), Project on Developing Biosafety Guidelines for Latin America and the Caribbean – Ongoing (https://bch.biodiv.org/database/record.shtml?id=5851);

14. Technical Cooperation Network on Plant Biotechnology in Latin American and the Caribbean (REDBIO) Initiatives in Biosafety – Ongoing since 1990 (http://www.redbio.org/html/bacgro.asp).

OTHER REGIONAL BIOSAFETY COOPERATION EFFORTS

In addition to the above project/programme-oriented regional initiatives, there are a number of intergovernmental efforts initiated in recent years to help build regional capacities, foster partnerships and networking, encourage exchange of information and expertise and/or facilitate harmonisation of policies and regulatory frameworks for biotechnology and biosafety. Those efforts are spearhead and coordinated by different regional bodies, including:

- UN regional economic commissions, i.e.: the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC);

- Regional economic integration organisations, e.g.: the African Union (AU), European Union (EU), Organization of American States (OAS) as well as subregional economic integration organisations such as: the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), and the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), The Andean Community, Southern Common Market (Mercosur) and South American Community of Nations (CSN).

- Regional Research and Development organizations such as: Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA) and West and Central African Council for Research and Development (CORAF/WECARD).

Examples of biosafety initiatives and processes from different regions include the following:

AFRICAN REGION

- *African Union Biosafety Initiative*: In July 2001, the African Council of Ministers of the African Union (AU) adopted the African Model Law on Safety in Biotechnology (AMLSB) to assist the Member States in developing comprehensive national biosafety frameworks. In July 2003, the Executive Council of the African Union endorsed the establishment of an Africa-wide Biosafety System as well as an Africa-wide Capacity Building Programme in Biosafety to strengthen the abilities of Member States to deal with biosafety issues. Subsequently, the African Union Biosafety Capacity-Building Project, supported by the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) was launched in 2006 to support the development of an AU Strategy to implement the provisions of the Biosafety Protocol and the African Model Law, maintain a network for continuous information exchange and

strengthen the technical and laboratory capacities for identification of GMOs at regional and subregional levels. In November 2006, the African Ministerial Council on Science and Technology (AMCOST) adopted an "African Strategy on Biosafety" and "African Position on the Issue of Genetically Modified Organisms and Agriculture". The Strategy, *inter alia*, aims at guiding modern biotechnology developments at national, subregional and regional (Africa-wide) levels and creating and strengthening regional centres of excellence in both modern biotechnology and biosafety, at least one in each of the five subregions of Africa. These will play an important role in risk assessment, risk management, capacity building, as well as GMO testing and provision of any other relevant biosafety advice. 13/

- *ASARECA Biotechnology and Biosafety Program*: 14/ The biosafety component of the ASARECA Biotechnology and Biosafety program aims to provide a subregional biosafety support center (RBSC). The RBSC will link the national biosafety focal points (NBFs) of member countries, provide a process for regional review of GMO applications and will coordinate training and information exchange among ASARECA partners and stakeholders. In addition the center will coordinate biosafety template development for laboratory work, greenhouse testing, clinical trials, field trials, commercial release and commodity imports. This center will also enable participation in regional biosafety policy dialogue. These components are packaged to deliver independent results in a coordinated manner to accomplish a common purpose.

- *CORAF/WECARD Biotechnology and Biosafety Programme (CORAF-BBP)*: 15/ The CORAF-BBP coordinated by CORAF/WECARD aims to ensure the safe deployment of GM products in the subregion by: 1) Promoting the adoption of common biosafety procedures and approaches (including: (i) harmonized regional forms for GMO application, handling, inspection and reporting; (ii) common risk assessment and risk management procedures and guidelines; standard protocols/manuals for laboratory, greenhouses, confined field trials and food/feed safety testing; and mechanisms for stakeholder participation); 2) Building or strengthening institutional capacities and human resources in biosafety implementation (including: regional training workshops in risk assessment and risk management, monitoring and evaluation, drafting on development of biosafety regulations and guidelines, preparation of dossiers), Development of biosafety curricula, and award of fellowships for participation in international biosafety meetings including conferences, workshops, training programs, and presentation of papers; 3) Awareness creation, including through: development of biotechnology and biosafety information materials (e.g. brochures and CD-ROMs), establishment of a regional website, organization of regional stakeholder forums and policy dialogues on biosafety; and 4) Support for establishment of a regional regulatory framework, including through: organization of regional policy dialogues to discuss options for a regional regulatory framework.

- *SADC Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and Biosafety (SACBB):* In 2002, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Council of Ministers established the SADC Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and Biosafety (SACBB). 16/ The aim of the SACBB is to assist SADC member States develop capacity to regulate Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). Its Terms of Reference, inter alia, included: studying reports of fact-finding missions and making appropriate

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13/ See details at: http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/AUC/Departments/HRST/biosafety/AU_Biosafety.htm

14/ ASARECA includes ten countries: Burundi, D. R. Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. See details at: http://www.asareca.org/index.php?option=networks&Itemid=54#5

15/ CORAF/WECARD, founded in March 1987, comprises National Agricultural Research systems (NARS) of 21 countries in West and Central Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African, R. Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Chad and Togo. See details about the programme at: http://www.coraf.org/English/projets.php

16/ SADC is a regional grouping of 14 Southern African countries (Angola, Botswana, DR Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, The Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

recommendations to the SADC Secretariat; preparation of a regional policy and strategy to guide Member States enact necessary legislation on biotechnology and biosafety and also to develop a model legislation that would take into account the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol and the African Union Biosafety Model Law. The committee provides advice to SADC countries on issues associated with biotechnology and biosafety, and proposes ways of harmonizing regulations and policies.

ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

- *Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) High Level Policy Dialogue on Agricultural Biotechnology):* 17/ In 2002, the APEC initiated the annual High Level Policy Dialogue on Agricultural Biotechnology (HLPDAB) to promote the safe introduction of biotechnology products through policy information exchange on agricultural biotechnology and biosafety and effective collaboration with other APEC forums. A high-level Conference on Biosafety Policy Options was held 16-18 January 2006 in Manila, Philippine. The HLPDAB works closely with the APEC sub-group on Research, Development and Extension of Agricultural Biotechnology (RDEAB) of the Agricultural Technical Cooperation Working Group (ATCWG). The objective of RDEAB is to promote the safe usage of agricultural biotechnology, through establishing transparent, science-based approaches to risk assessment; encouraging technical cooperation between Member Economies; and assisting in building the regulatory capacity of Economies as a whole. 18/ Its activities, *inter alia,* include developing research on the effects of gene flow and the effects of genetically modified crops in centres of origin; and encouraging a dialogue between the private and public sectors to promote research and safety in the development of biotechnology.

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- *CARICOM Working Group on Genetically Modified Organisms*: In 2005, the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) established a Working Group on GMOs. Its mandate is to mobilise technical opinion on GMO to assist member countries in the formulation of policies and strategies relating to the development, importation into the Region, and use of GMO among others. Representatives of the group include professional/scientific interest, businesses, and public sector and consumers interest in member States.

17/ See details at: http://www.apec.org/apec/apec_groups/other_apec_groups/agricultural_biotechnology.html

18/ See further information about the RDEAB at: http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/sci/biotech/capac/rdeabe.shtml