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INFORMATION-SHARING

*Progress report on the development and implementation of the pilot phase of
the Biosafety Clearing-House*

Addendum

**SYNTHESIS OF CAPACITY-BUILDING NEEDS IDENTIFIED BY THE REGIONS FOR
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PILOT PHASE OF THE BIOSAFETY
CLEARING-HOUSE**

Note by the Executive Secretary

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Biosafety Clearing-House, established by Article 20 of the Protocol, is a critical component for implementation of the Biosafety Protocol. Parties will need to have the necessary capacities to use the Biosafety Clearing-House in order to fulfill their obligations under certain specific provisions of the Protocol, to facilitate the exchange of scientific, technical, environmental and legal information, and to report to the Biosafety Clearing-House on measures taken to implement the Protocol.

2. The Protocol obliges Parties, for example: to communicate to the notifier and to the Biosafety Clearing-House any decision whether transboundary movement of living modified organisms (LMOs) for intentional introduction into the environment may proceed (Article 10); to inform the Parties through the Biosafety Clearing-House of a final decision regarding domestic use, including placing on the market, of an LMO that may be subject to transboundary movement for direct use as food, for feed or for processing (Article 11); and to make available to the Biosafety Clearing-House information, including summaries of risk assessments or environmental reviews and decisions regarding importation or release of LMOs (Article 20). It is therefore imperative that all countries acquire the necessary capacity to access and use the Biosafety Clearing-House.

3. In accordance with the request from the ICCP at its first meeting, the Secretariat is, on a continuing basis, analyzing the identified capacity-building and financial requirements of developing countries, in particular the least developed and small island developing States among them, and countries

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with economies in transition, as well as countries that are centres of origin and centres of genetic diversity, to enable their active participation in the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

4. To this end, four regional workshops on the Biosafety Clearing-House were held for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Central and Eastern Europe and Asia & Pacific in order to provide countries with the opportunity to express their needs and expectations with regard to their participation in the establishment and implementation of the pilot phase. This note provides a synthesis of capacity-building needs identified at these regional meetings, with a view to assisting the Intergovernmental Committee consider the possibility of establishing a capacity-building programme to address those needs.

5. The regional meeting for the African countries was held in Nairobi, from 26 to 28 February 2001 (UNEP/CBD/BCH/Afr.Reg/1/2) and an additional one-day "hands-on" training on the use of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House (which had not been launched at the time of the first regional meeting) was convened in Nairobi, on 19 January 2002. The meeting for the Latin America and the Caribbean region was held in Lima, from 4 to 6 September 2001 (UNEP/CBD/BCH/LAC.Reg/1/2). The meeting for the Central and Eastern European region was held in Nitra, Slovakia on 5 and 8 to 9 February 2002 (UNEP/CBD/BCH/CEE.Reg/1/2), and for the Asia and Pacific region in Beijing on 4 and 7 to 8 March 2002 (UNEP/CBD/BCH/AP.Reg/1/2), back-to-back with UNEP/GEF regional workshops on the development of national biosafety frameworks.

6. Financial support for these meetings was generously provided by the Governments of the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Japan.

7. The present note from the Executive Secretary provides an initial synthesis of capacity-building needs identified during the regional meetings on the Biosafety Clearing-House and the main actions proposed to address them. It begins with a summary of the types of capacity-building needs and priorities identified by the regions needed to participate in the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House; identifies overall emerging issues that were raised during the regional meetings; and outlines potential approaches and options for achieving the required capacities identified by the regions.

II. TYPES OF CAPACITY-BUILDING NEEDS IDENTIFIED FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PILOT PHASE OF THE BIOSAFETY CLEARING-HOUSE

8. The four regions identified a number of capacity building needs regarding information exchange under the Protocol, and participation in the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House in particular. All the regions stressed the essential inter-linkage between capacity-building for the implementation of the Biosafety Clearing-House, and for the management of biosafety and implementation of the Biosafety Protocol. However, it was recognised that the broader capacity needs for implementation of the Protocol would be addressed under the Action Plan for Building Capacities for the Effective Implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety which was endorsed by the ICCP at its second meeting (UNEP/CBD/ICCP/2/15, recommendation 2/9). Accordingly, the regional meetings focussed primarily on determining capacity needs and priorities specific to the implementation of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

9. Four main categories of capacity needs were identified for an effective implementation of the Biosafety Clearing-House by developing countries and countries with economies in transition, namely: developing human resources and technical expertise; building and maintaining infrastructure; developing institutional synergies; and continued development of a non-web, non-Internet based system to access the Biosafety Clearing-House. A fifth, cross-cutting, need for sustainable financial resources was also identified.

A. Developing human resources and technical expertise

Identified needs

10. Under this category, all the regions emphasized the need to develop and maintain adequate human resources with sufficient technical expertise to establish, operationalize and maintain the Biosafety Clearing-House, including specialists in the following areas: information management, information communication technology (ICT), database management and data analysis.

Ways and means to address the needs

11. The regions proposed to address this category of needs through training and education of key personnel, including national focal points and responsible personnel in Competent National Authorities, to ensure that they are familiar with their tasks and responsibilities and the operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House. Specific priority actions identified include: training courses, workshops, training of trainers and development of appropriate training materials and user manuals.

B. Building and maintaining infrastructure

Identified needs

12. Under this category, countries highlighted the need to acquire and maintain appropriate facilities and equipment to implement the Internet-based Biosafety Clearing-House, including: adequate hardware and software, installation of modern information technologies and training in their use, and good telecommunications and Internet connectivity as required to search, locate, gather, receive, process, store and disseminate information effectively.

Ways and means to address the needs

13. The following priority actions were proposed to address the key infrastructure needs for developing countries, in particular the least developed and small island developing States among them, and countries with economies in transition, to fully participate in the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House:

(a) Review of existing technical infrastructures at the national level and assessing national capacities to access and use information technologies and telecommunications;

(b) Establishment, support and strengthening of sub-regional and regional nodes for the Biosafety Clearing-House to assist in providing easy and cost-effective access to Internet-based biosafety information. Regional and sub-regional networks for information-exchange will also increase effective exchange of information among national, regional and international stakeholders;

(c) Acquisition of new hardware and software and Internet access to establish and maintain national databases and effective information exchange mechanisms that are interoperable with the Biosafety Clearing-House. Countries could benefit from the Convention's clearing-house mechanism structures when developing national biosafety clearing-houses;

(d) Use of "mirror" websites to enhance speed of access to the Internet-based websites.

C. Developing institutional synergies

Identified needs

14. This category encompassed the need for development of the administrative structures and procedures necessary for effective, coordinated and harmonized exchange of information. Countries noted the importance of promoting synergies and cooperation between national institutions, local authorities (within the policy, legislative and administrative systems) and relevant stakeholders, to provide a suitable environment for effective exchange of information at a national level. They also highlighted the need for standardized formats and procedures for information exchange and harmonization of mechanisms for reporting information.

Ways and means to address the needs

15. Mechanisms and actions proposed to address these needs include:

- (a) Organization of meetings;
- (b) Timely dissemination of documents to relevant stakeholders;
- (c) Clear division of responsibilities among institutions and authorities;
- (d) Promoting networking between Competent National Authorities and the national biosafety clearing-houses;
- (e) Creation of synergies and cooperation between national focal points and Competent National Authorities and relevant stakeholders, for example through national and regional meetings for them;
- (f) Exchange of specialists and improvement of technical cooperation to facilitate technology transfer;
- (g) Establishment of mechanisms to ensure a continual flow of information/data;
- (h) Harmonization of regional information systems, for example through workshops to promote synergies between countries in the regions.

D. Development of a non-Web, non-Internet based system

Identified needs

16. Some countries, especially the least developed and small island developing States, emphasized the need for the continued development of non-web, non-Internet based mechanisms to access the Biosafety Clearing-House. Unreliable telecommunications systems and high cost of access to the Internet were of particular concern for those countries.

Ways and means to address the needs

17. The countries identified a number of alternatives, including the use of fax and telephone, and the provision of CD-ROMs and hard copies of documents, to ensure equitable participation in the Biosafety Clearing-House.

E. Provision of financial and technical support

Identified needs

18. An essential cross-cutting theme identified by all regions was the provision of adequate and sustainable financial resources and technical support, which is a critical need to enable all countries to effectively implement and maintain the Biosafety Clearing-House.

Ways and means to address the needs

19. Some of the actions proposed to address this need included the following:

- (a) Developing national/regional proposals for technical and financial assistance
- (b) Requesting funding organizations, such as GEF and others, to support national, sub-regional and regional projects
- (c) Creating awareness and political support for continuous funding from national governments
- (d) Fundraising.

III. OTHER EMERGING ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED DURING THE MEETINGS

20. In addition to the general consensus on capacity requirements to implement the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House, several emerging issues were raised as priorities by different regions, including the need for: management of confidential information and intellectual property rights issues; information security, mobilization of political support for the Biosafety Clearing-House; and translation of information into the six official United Nations languages.

A. Confidential information and intellectual property rights

21. Although confidential information will not be transmitted through the Biosafety Clearing-House, the Latin America and the Caribbean region noted that management of such information is an important issue at national level with regard to implementing the requirements of the Protocol. In addition, the issue of managing intellectual property rights will also arise from the creation of new information systems. Training in management of these issues was suggested to assist countries to build capacity to manage these issues.

B. Information security

22. The GRULAC region also raised the issue of security of information registered with the Biosafety Clearing-House and the need for countries to develop the capacity to protect their information systems and databases from hackers and other unauthorized users, including regulation of access to the restricted areas of the systems. It was recommended that countries should organise regular training courses and workshops in the safe handling of information.

C. Mobilization of political support

23. The Central and Eastern European region noted the importance of increasing political awareness of the international importance of the Biosafety Clearing-House, in order to mobilize political support for the implementation of the pilot phase. The activities proposed to achieve this include: working with stakeholders to increase public awareness of the role of the Biosafety Clearing-House and demonstrating the international importance of the Biosafety Clearing-House.

D. Use of the “tool kit” and other mechanisms to facilitate information-sharing

24. The GRULAC region requested that each country to assess its needs and capacities with relation to the implementation of the Biosafety Clearing-House tool-kit. All regions noted the value of the tool-kit to facilitate understanding the operation of the Biosafety Clearing-House, and noted that it could be expanded further (for example, to assist countries in establishing national databases), and that its availability in languages would assist wider participation in the pilot phase. The Asia Pacific region also noted that regional nodes, or online support centres, could be networked to in a way that enables authorities to share information and access to regional databases, discuss developments or incidents that require immediate action and take rapid decisions.

E. Translation of information

25. The Central and Eastern European region noted that in order to make information available globally, it would need to be translated into one of the six official United Nations languages. Furthermore, in many cases it will be necessary to translate information that is retrieved from the Biosafety Clearing-House to enable its use within different countries. Costs associated with these activities will need to be met to ensure that the information exchanged through the Biosafety Clearing-House is usable.

IV. CONCLUSION

26. Following the initial assessment of needs, Latin America and the Caribbean, Central and Eastern Europe and the Asia Pacific regions prepared action plans detailing options at the national and regional level to address those needs. These activities, and other areas of capacity-building (such as those identified by the African region) will generally need to be supported through the provision of external technical assistance and financial resources on a bilateral, multilateral or private basis.

27. The synthesis of capacity-building needs outlined in the present document responds to the mandate set out in decision annex I to UNEP/CBD/ICCP/1/9. Although this analysis is being undertaken prior to entry-into-force of the Protocol, it nonetheless can serve to provide guidance to countries seeking to strengthen their capacities for implementation of the Biosafety Clearing-House, and to other bodies such as bilateral and multilateral cooperation and financing programmes and the engaged private sector which are in a position to cooperate in supporting such efforts. Guidance on capacity-building for the Biosafety Clearing-House prepared by the ICCP can then be considered by the first Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol for further action in the post-entry-into-force period.

28. The differing needs of each country will require that specific capacity-building and resource requirements are identified on a country-by-country basis, and the potential roles of different types of organizations to address them in each case explored. This will depend on the willingness and expertise of different players and the effective utilization of available financial and technical resources available through the range of organizations involved in such capacity-building efforts. Likewise, the ability to address the identified capacity needs effectively will require a combination of creativity, complementarity, coordinated approaches, intra- and inter-regional collaboration and broader development cooperation.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE ICCP

29. The ICCP is invited to consider the identified regional capacity needs and the proposed approaches and action plans to enable developing countries, in particular the least developed and small island developing States among them, and countries with economies in transition, to participate effectively in the implementation of the Biosafety Clearing-House. The ICCP may wish to:

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- (a) Take note of the present synthesis report and the regional recommendations and action plans;
- (b) Invite developed country Parties and Governments and relevant organizations to provide financial and technical support to enable countries to start implementing the recommendations and the capacity-building action plans that were developed through the regional meetings for implementation of the pilot phase of the Biosafety Clearing-House, and for the capacity-building programme for the Biosafety Clearing-House when developed;
- (c) Invite the UNEP/GEF project on the development of national biosafety frameworks to support, as appropriate, implementation of the recommendations arising from the regional meetings to enable countries to participate in the Biosafety Clearing-House;
- (d) Request the Executive Secretary, in developing the coordination mechanism for the implementation of the Action Plan for Building Capacities for the Effective Implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety with a view to promoting partnerships and to maximize complementarities and synergies between various capacity building initiatives, to take into account the specific needs for the Biosafety Clearing-House, based on the outcomes of the regional meetings.
