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**CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION
ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY SERVING AS THE
MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE CARTAGENA
PROTOCOL ON BIOSAFETY**

Second meeting

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Item 15 of the provisional agenda*

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION***Options for cooperation of Parties with other States and international bodies on the promotion and facilitation of public awareness, education and participation concerning living modified organisms (Article 23, paragraph 1 (a))****Note by the Executive Secretary***I. INTRODUCTION**

1. In its decision BS-I/12 on the medium-term programme of work, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety agreed to consider, at its second meeting, “options for cooperation, as appropriate, with other States and international bodies, on the promotion and facilitation of public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms in relation to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, taking into account also risks to human health (Article 23, paragraph 1(a))”.
2. The present note has been prepared to assist the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol in its consideration of the options for the cooperation referred to in paragraph 1 above. Such cooperation can occur at different levels—subregional, regional or international. It can also take different forms ranging from an ad-hoc exchange of information and experiences, networking or joint initiatives to more formal types of cooperation (supported by memoranda of cooperation or bilateral agreements/arrangements).
3. Section II of the present note describes briefly the current status of implementation of Article 23, paragraph 1 (a), of the Protocol. Section III outlines options for cooperation, including through existing regional and international initiatives or processes that are making, or which could potentially make, a contribution. Some examples of such initiatives and processes are described and other general options (measures, tools, and mechanisms) are outlined. Recommendations on possible actions that could be taken to leverage and maximize the opportunities arising from the different options are proposed. Section IV summarizes the main issues and options discussed in the note and

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presents the elements of a possible decision which the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol may wish to consider.

II. THE CURRENT STATUS OF PUBLIC AWARENESS, EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROTOCOL

4. Public awareness, education and participation are important elements for the successful and effective implementation of the Protocol. The public has an important role to play in contributing to ensuring the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms. However, in order for people to support and contribute meaningfully to national and global efforts to implement the Protocol, they need to know and understand the issues. They also need to be actively involved in the relevant processes.

5. In exploring options for cooperation by Parties with other States and relevant international bodies on the promotion and facilitation of public awareness, education and participation concerning living modified organisms, it may be informative to review the current “state of the art” and the major constraints. It may also be useful to review the ongoing initiatives and consider how the opportunities they offer could be maximized to support the implementation of Article 23, paragraph 1 (a), of the Protocol.

6. Over the last few years, especially following the adoption of the Protocol in January 2000, a number of initiatives have been taken to promote public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms. Notable among those initiatives are the projects funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) on the development and implementation of national biosafety frameworks. With support from those projects, more than 130 countries have undertaken various biosafety public awareness and education activities, including the organization of workshops and public consultative meetings and dissemination of awareness materials. Many countries have also established systems for public participation and public access to information as part of their national biosafety frameworks.

7. Several other ongoing biosafety projects and initiatives that are funded by different organizations also have components specifically contributing to the implementation of Article 23, paragraph 1 (a), of the Protocol. According to information available in the capacity-building projects database in the Biosafety Clearing-House, as of 15 February 2005, at least 45 out of the 74 ongoing projects had activities on promoting public awareness, education and participation.^{1/} A few organizations are also maintaining information services (e-mail listservs) which periodically disseminate biosafety-related information to interested audiences.^{2/}

8. Despite the various initiatives already undertaken and those presently underway, the level of public awareness, education and participation regarding living modified organisms is still very low in many countries, especially developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Those countries are facing major limitations including a lack of financial resources and technical skills, poor access to information, a lack of modern communication technologies and an unavailability of resource materials in user-friendly formats and languages.

9. According to the information submitted to the country capacity needs database in the Biosafety Clearing-House, several countries identified capacity-building for promoting public

^{1/} See the capacity-building projects database at: <http://bch.biodiv.org/capacitybuilding/default.shtml>.

^{2/} Examples of biosafety-related information services (e-mail listservs) include: Third World Network (TWN) Biosafety Information Service, CropBiotech Update maintained by International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA) and Agnet maintained by the Food Safety Network based at the University of Guelph in Canada.

awareness, education and participation as one of their major priority needs.^{3/} In particular, a number of countries highlighted the need for support to organize and implement public awareness programmes, mechanisms to access biosafety awareness materials and communication networks. Support is also needed to acquire skills and systems for promoting public participation in decision-making. Some countries indicated that they require training in effective outreach skills including the engagement of the mass media.

10. There is a need to promote public awareness and education on a number of specific issues related to the implementation of the Protocol, including the requirements under the Protocol. In one submission to the Secretariat, for example, it was noted that a number of stakeholders, such as university and private-sector scientists interested in importing or exporting living modified organism materials for intentional release or contained use are unclear on the new requirements arising, or that may arise, as a result of implementing the Biosafety Protocol (see document UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/2/INF/4). It emphasized the need for the education and awareness of different stakeholders about the requirements under the Protocol including any changes to existing national laws or regulations. In particular, it noted the need to inform, educate and communicate with importers (both public and private) about the requirements in paragraphs 2(b) and (c) of Article 18 of the Protocol.

11. The Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol may wish to invite Parties, other States and relevant international bodies to cooperate and assist each other in addressing the constraints and gaps in the promotion and facilitation of public awareness, education and participation for the effective implementation of the Protocol. This could be done through joint implementation or funding biosafety outreach programmes and sharing information regarding their programmes and activities, including best practices and lessons learned, through the Biosafety Clearing-House.

III. OPTIONS FOR COOPERATION IN PROMOTING AND FACILITATING PUBLIC AWARENESS, EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION REGARDING LIVING MODIFIED ORGANISMS

12. There are a number of options through which Parties, other States and relevant international bodies could cooperate to promote and facilitate public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms in relation to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, taking into account also risks to human health. These include cooperation through existing regional and international initiatives and processes. Examples of initiatives that are already contributing to, or which could potentially contribute to, the implementation of Article 23, paragraph 1 (a), of the Protocol include the following:

(a) The projects on the development and implementation of national biosafety frameworks funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF);

(b) The Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) Initiative under the Convention on Biological Diversity;

(c) The Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (particularly its work on genetically modified organisms).^{4/}

13. The present section describes the three above-mentioned options. Other relevant processes, such as the International Plant Protection Convention; and the United Nations Decade of Education

^{3/} At least 42 out of the 50 countries that had submitted information to the Biosafety Clearing-House, as of 15 February 2005, identified public awareness, education and participation as a priority need. Detailed information can be accessed from the country capacity needs database at: <http://bch.biodiv.org/Pilot/CapacityBuilding/SearchCapacityNeeds.aspx>.

^{4/} The Aarhus Convention was adopted in 1998 under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and entered into force in October 2001. To date, 30 countries have ratified the Convention. For details, see <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/gmo.htm>.

for Sustainable Development are also briefly discussed. The section also outlines other general measures and options through which cooperation could be established or strengthened. Recommendations on possible actions that could be taken under each of the options are proposed.

A. *GEF-funded projects on the development and implementation of national biosafety frameworks*

14. The projects on the development and implementation of national biosafety frameworks, funded by the Global Environment Facility are the largest global capacity-building initiatives on biosafety that have major components on public awareness, education and participation. ^{5/} Under the UNEP-GEF project on the development of national biosafety frameworks in particular, a number of biosafety public awareness and education activities have been undertaken. In addition, most of the 123 countries supported by the project have developed “systems for public information and public participation regarding living modified organisms” as part of their national biosafety frameworks.

15. Many countries will soon be embarking on the implementation of their national biosafety frameworks. This process will provide an opportunity for Parties, other States and relevant international bodies to cooperate regarding the implementation of the systems for public information and public participation. Such cooperation could take the form of co-financing, joint activities, sharing of information and experience or the joint production of awareness and resource materials.

B. *Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) Initiative under the Convention on Biological Diversity*

16. In decision VI/19, the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted a Global Initiative on Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) to facilitate cooperation among the Parties and other international organizations in the implementation of Article 13 of the Convention which addresses public awareness and education. Many of the programme elements and activities under the CEPA initiative could be used to foster cooperation of Parties with other States and relevant international bodies in the implementation of Article 23, paragraph 1 (a), of the Protocol. In particular, the CEPA electronic portal which has been developed under the website of the Convention on Biological Diversity would be a useful means to share information on best practices for building awareness and developing communication capacity. ^{6/} The portal consists of moderated electronic forums, a registry of biodiversity education and communications experts, hyperlinks to educational institutions and centres of excellence, links to databases with relevant case-studies and publications.

17. Programme element 2 of the CEPA work programme which focuses on facilitating cooperation in the exchange of knowledge and expertise among CEPA professionals would also be useful. As well, programme element 3 focusing on capacity-building for communication, education and public awareness would be relevant. This encompasses the establishment of systems for professional exchange, the promotion of twinning programmes and the establishment of distance-learning programmes on communication, education and public awareness.

^{5/} For details of some of those GEF-funded biosafety projects, see <http://www.unep.ch/biosafety/>.

^{6/} For details, see <http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/outreach/cepa/home.shtml>.

C. Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

18. The Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (known as the Aarhus Convention) is another possible means through which Parties, other States and relevant international bodies could cooperate. For example, the work of the Convention with respect to genetically modified organisms may be relevant to the implementation of Article 23, paragraph 1 (a), of the Protocol. ^{7/}

19. Accordingly, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol may wish to invite Parties to the Protocol and other States which are also Parties or signatories to Aarhus Convention to identify opportunities for cooperation in the promotion of public awareness, education and participation concerning living modified organisms through the Aarhus Convention. It may also wish to invite the Executive Secretary to strengthen the cooperation with the Secretariat of the Aarhus Convention in this regard.

D. Other relevant instruments and processes

20. There are two other instruments and processes through which cooperation could occur: (i) the International Plant Protection Convention; and (2) the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

21. *The International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)* aims to prevent the spread and introduction of pests of plants and plant products and to promote appropriate measures for their control. Living modified organisms considered to be plant pests fall within the scope of the Convention. ^{8/} It requires Parties to cooperate with one another, including in the exchange of information on plant pests that may be of immediate or potential danger. The national focal points of the IPPC and those of the Cartagena Protocol in different countries could cooperate in promoting public awareness and by sharing information regarding phytosanitary measures for living modified organisms as well as establishing links between their relevant information systems.

22. *The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014)*, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly in resolution 57/254, could be another possible option for cooperation. ^{9/} The objective of the Decade is to promote education as a basis for a more sustainable human society, to integrate sustainable development into education systems at all levels and to strengthen international cooperation towards the development and sharing of innovative education for sustainable development programmes, practices and policies. The Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol may wish to invite Parties and other States to include in their programmes for marking the Decade specific activities related to promoting public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms in relation to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, taking into account also risks to human health.

^{7/} In 2002, Parties to the Convention adopted non-binding Guidelines on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice with respect to Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). Also a Working Group on Genetically Modified Organisms was established to explore the options for a legally binding approach.

^{8/} An Open-ended Working Group of the Interim Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (ICPM) established under the Convention is developing specifications for an international standard for phytosanitary measures regarding living modified organisms. For details, see <https://www.ippc.int/IPP/En/default.jsp>.

^{9/} The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development was established in response to a recommendation by the World Summit on Sustainable Development. It will be launched on 1 March 2005 in New York. Governments are expected to include in their respective educational strategies and action plans measures to achieve the objective of the Decade. For details see http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=27234&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

E. Other general measures and options for cooperation

23. There are a number of other options through which Parties, other States and relevant international bodies could cooperate in promoting and facilitating public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms. Examples of those options and the specific actions that could be taken under each option are outlined below. The Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol may wish to consider the proposed options and determine how best they could be implemented and identify the relevant actors.

24. *Sharing of biosafety educational and guidance materials:*

(a) Development of prototype educational materials (booklets, posters and audio-visual materials) as well guidance and resource materials on public awareness, education and participation (e.g. toolkits, guidelines or case-studies on tested tools and approaches) and sharing these through the Biosafety Information Resource Centre in the Biosafety Clearing-House;

(b) Adaptation of the prototype materials to produce targeted educational materials in formats, language or level of simplicity that are appropriate to the specific audiences;

(c) Exchange of educational materials directly between relevant institutions (Government agencies, schools, nongovernmental organizations and others).

25. *Promotion of information exchange and networking:*

(a) Establishment of thematic or geographic (subregional or regional) networks to facilitate ongoing interaction and exchange information on best practices and lessons learned in the promotion of public awareness, education and participation;

(b) Establishment or strengthening of subregional and regional biosafety information centres and/or nodes of the Biosafety Clearing-House to facilitate easier and timely dissemination of information within specific geographic areas;

(c) Establishment of links between the websites of different institutions in order enable users to access a wide range of information resources and experiences;

(d) Organization of discussion forums to facilitate exchange of views and experience on ways and means of enhancing public awareness, education and participation concerning living modified organisms;

(e) Encouragement of existing subregional and regional organizations and centres of excellence to play an active role in facilitating cooperation in the promotion of public awareness, education and participation concerning living modified organisms. ^{10/}

26. *Sharing of experience and expertise:*

(a) Professional exchanges or technical assistance;

(b) Use of the roster of experts, which is accessible through the Biosafety Clearing-House, to identify experts in public awareness, education and participation.

^{10/} Some subregional and regional organizations are already dealing with biosafety issues. Examples include: *in Africa*: the African Union Commission, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC); *in Asia and the Pacific*: the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP); *in Latin America and the Caribbean*: the Organization of American States (OAS); and *in Central and Eastern Europe*: Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC).

27. *Cooperation in training and capacity-building:*

- (a) Training of trainers in core education and communication skills and methods, in order to create a pool of specialists (including biosafety educators and communicators) could be mobilized in each region;
- (b) Professional exchanges and twinning programmes between different States and organizations;
- (c) Distance-learning programmes;
- (d) Provision of scholarships and fellowships;
- (e) Cooperation in building national capacities to boost the role of the media in the implementation of Article 23, paragraph 1 (a), of the Protocol.

28. *Cooperation through bilateral and multilateral projects or joint programmes:* ^{11/}

- (a) Development of bilateral and multilateral projects with specific components on the promotion of public awareness, education and participation concerning living modified organisms;
- (b) Pooling of resources by States to implement joint subregional, regional or inter-regional projects/ initiatives;
- (c) Joint funding raising by multiple agencies to support public awareness, education and participation activities in one or several countries.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

29. Public awareness, education and participation are important elements for the effective implementation of the Protocol. However, many developing countries and countries with economies in transition are facing significant constraints including a lack of financial resources and technical skills, poor access to information, lack of modern communication technologies and the unavailability of resource materials in user-friendly formats and languages. Cooperation is needed at different levels—bilateral, regional and international—to assist countries to overcome those barriers.

30. This note has highlighted examples of possible options for cooperation, including through existing initiatives and processes. The Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol is invited to consider the information contained in this note and the draft elements of a possible decision proposed below. On the basis of the information contained in the present note, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol may wish to:

1. *Take note* of the options for facilitating cooperation of Parties with other States and relevant international bodies in the promotion of public awareness, education and participation concerning living modified organisms contained in the present note;

2. *Encourage* Parties and other States, as part of their efforts in implementing Article 23, paragraph 1 (a), to seek and leverage opportunities for cooperation with other Parties, other States and relevant international bodies at subregional, regional and international levels, taking into account the options referred to in paragraph 1 above;

^{11/} There are a number of ongoing bilateral and multilateral biosafety projects with major components on public awareness, education and participation. Examples include those funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), entitled: “Civil society participation in Algeria’s biosafety process” and “Biosafety Capacity Building in China: Data Management, Promoting Expertise and Awareness Raising”. See: <http://bch.biodiv.org/capacitybuilding/default.shtml>

3. *Urge* Parties and other States to develop and implement national programmes for public awareness, education and participation, including public access to information, regarding the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms;

4. *Invite* the Global Environment Facility, other funding institutions and relevant international bodies to provide financial and other support to developing country Parties and Parties with economies in transition for the public awareness, education and participation projects and activities concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms;

5. *Invite* Parties, other States, and relevant international bodies to share, through the Biosafety Information Resource Centre in the Biosafety Clearing-House, information and case-studies about their ongoing initiatives on public awareness, education and participation, including major accomplishments, success stories, best practices and lessons learned as well as limitations experienced;

6. *Encourage* Parties and other States to make effective use of the media to promote public awareness and education concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms;

7. *Urge* Parties, other Government and relevant international bodies to develop and support subregional and regional public awareness and education initiatives concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms;

8. *Remind* Parties and other States to submit to the Biosafety Clearing-House information regarding their capacity needs, gaps and priorities with respect to public awareness, education and participation;

9. *Encourage* Parties, other States and relevant international bodies to make effective use of the tools and mechanisms established under the Global Initiative on Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) under the Convention on Biological Diversity;

10. *Invite* Parties, other States and relevant international bodies to include in their programmes for implementing the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development specific activities related to promoting public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms in relation to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, taking into account also risks to human health;

11. *Invite* Parties and other States that are also Parties or signatories to the Aarhus Convention to explore and maximize opportunities for cooperation in the promotion of public awareness, education and participation concerning living modified organisms through the frameworks provided by the two treaties;

12. *Request* the Executive Secretary to continue promoting public awareness and education on the Protocol, including through the Protocol website, the outreach strategy for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/1/INF/16) as well as publications such as a handbook reflecting developments in the Protocol process;

13. *Decide* to consider, and review progress on the implementation of Article 23, paragraph 1 (a), of the Protocol at its fifth meeting;

14. *Request* the Executive Secretary to prepare, on the basis of the submissions made in accordance with paragraph 5 above, a synthesis report on the status of implementation of Article 23, paragraph 1 (a), of the Protocol for consideration by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol at its fifth meeting.
