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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

Sixth meeting
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Item 9 of the provisional agenda*

CAPACITY-BUILDING: ONLINE FORUM ON STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO CAPACITY-BUILDING IN BIOSAFETY

Note by the Executive Secretary

In paragraph 19 of its decision BS-V/3, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety requested the Executive Secretary to organize an online forum on strategic approaches to capacity-building and to submit the outcomes of the forum to the sixth meeting of the Parties. Accordingly, the online forum was launched on 20 February 2012 through the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) at http://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_art22/cbforum2012.shtml, and was scheduled run until 4 May 2012. It was initially organized under five discussion groups, which were subsequently reduced to two.

A notification was sent on 9 February 2012 inviting all national focal points and relevant organizations to take part in the forum, and a reminder was sent out on 29 February. However, the overall level of participation in the forum was low. A total of 13 participants from 9 governments and 4 organizations took part in the first discussion group, on the "Findings and recommendations of the independent evaluation of the capacity-building Action Plan", which ran from 20 February to 9 March 2012.¹ However, there was a total lack of participation in the subsequent scheduled discussion groups.

In order to give Parties, other Governments and relevant organizations another opportunity to share their views and suggestions, a last attempt was made by re-opening the forum for a period of 2 weeks, from 17 to 31 July 2012, and limiting the discussion to "Strategic approaches to capacity-building for the effective implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety". Unfortunately the level of participation was again very low; only 5 participants (from Austria, Guatemala, Iran, Iraq and Malaysia) took part in this discussion group. The views that were expressed are summarized in the section below.

* UNEP/CBD/BS/COP-MOP/6/1.

¹ The governments represented in the first discussion group were: Austria, Côte d'Ivoire, Czech Republic, Germany (the German Organisation for International Cooperation, GIZ), Liberia, Malaysia, Niger, Republic of Moldova and Spain. The organizations that took part were: IFPRI-Program for Biosafety Systems (PBS), GenØk – Centre for Biosafety, the Public Research & Regulation Initiative (PRRI), and the Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics based in India.

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SUMMARY OF VIEWS AND COMMENTS FROM THE ONLINE FORUM ON STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO CAPACITY-BUILDING

1. To facilitate the exchange of views and information under the discussion group on "Strategic approaches to capacity-building for the effective implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety", the Secretariat prepared introductory notes and discussion questions under various themes/subtopics. Participants were invited, *inter alia*, to express their views and suggestions on how to improve the design, delivery, coordination and evaluation of capacity-building initiatives, including how the choice and application of various capacity-building approaches and delivery methods could be improved; how capacity-building efforts could be better coordinated and mainstreamed into broader national and regional programmes; how capacity-building activities could be sustainably financed and technically supported; how capacity-building activities could be better monitored, evaluated and documented; how the experiences and lessons learned could be better documented, shared and used; how the results of capacity-building could be sustained; and how biosafety capacity-building could generally be improved.
2. The following subsections summarize the few submissions that were received under the respective discussion threads.

A. Current approaches to capacity-building in biosafety

3. Under this discussion thread, participants were invited to discuss, *inter alia*, the current general status and trends of capacity-building under the Protocol; the approaches to capacity-building in biosafety commonly being used, and their effectiveness and limitations; and the general criteria or considerations that should be taken into account in determining appropriate capacity-building approaches and delivery methods to use under various circumstances. The following submissions were made under this theme:

(a) The training of trainers is one of the most effective approaches to capacity-building; there is a need for a continuous process of building skills and knowledge. However, it was noted that the participants in training-of-trainers initiatives need to have experience or be equipped with skills in teaching or conducting training in order to be able to pass on the knowledge to others. Furthermore, the trained trainers need to have institutional structures, facilities and financial resources to enable them to train people in their organizations. These aspects need much attention to make the training-of-trainers approach more effective. Thus it was noted that selection of participants for a training-of-trainers workshop should be based on at least two main criteria: (i) is the participant in a position to be a trainer in the future; and (ii) is the participant part of a structure that offers capacity-building activities in his/her organization;

(b) In addition to the above points regarding the training-of-trainers approach, the following aspects and elements need to be considered: (i) the different target audiences need to include not only research or technical staff but also stakeholders and institutional actors that play important roles in raising awareness and in public communication; (ii) the processes of capacity-building and awareness-raising must be promoted concurrently if successful results are to be achieved; and (iii) science reporters and communicators must be considered as one of the key group of trainers to be trained, so as create a pool of reporters who can write articles that are easily comprehensible to the public and that are based on up-to-date, objective and properly analysed information from reliable sources;

(c) International organizations need to continue to focus their efforts on institutionalizing capacity-building programmes at the regional and national level. Efforts need to be focused on building the structures in the countries through which capacity-building programmes could be offered on a regular and long-term basis. In most developing countries, capacity-building providers for biosafety are already available but they are usually underfunded and not well equipped. Technical and financial assistance provided by international organizations could focus on sustaining, expanding and improving these structures, with the objective that capacity-building programmes on biosafety could eventually be provided on a regular basis in the country itself.

B. Approaches to capacity assessment (stocktaking and needs assessments)

4. The only submission made under this discussion thread noted that a needs assessment ought to be done with a clear long-term strategy describing how the identified needs will be prioritized and addressed. In addition, the assessment of already existing capacity in a country is equally important. Capacity assessment will help to identify the already existing basis on which new capacity-building activities can develop and the national institutions and local experts that could be involved in the design and implementation of the capacity-building activities. This requires careful insight into previous work done in a country and the existing structures and institutional settings. In some cases, countries that have received extensive support in certain areas may tend to still request more support on the same issues. To avoid such situations, careful evaluation of the impact and lessons learned from past and ongoing biosafety capacity-building programmes in a country is essential.

5. The submission also noted that it would be a good idea to develop a global needs assessment framework to assist Parties, especially developing country Parties, to properly conduct capacity needs assessments. The process of developing this framework should consider inputs from Parties, or involve representatives from Parties, to ensure its applicability.

C. Approaches to the design of biosafety capacity-building interventions

6. Two submissions were made under this discussion thread. In one submission it was noted that the ultimate goal of capacity-building is to sustain a process of individual and organizational change and to enable organizations and individuals to achieve their set objectives. Thus, any biosafety capacity-building activity must be carefully designed so that it contributes to this goal. In this process, it is essential that the needs of the beneficiaries as well as the already existing capacities in a country are carefully assessed and that the specific biosafety capacity-building objectives are clarified.

7. It was also noted that one of the main omissions in the design of current capacity-building activities is the lack of measures for ensuring the sustainability of capacity-building initiatives and activities. It was suggested that guidance be provided to countries on how to ensure that their capacity-building activities incorporate sustainability strategies to help ensure long-lasting impacts.

D. Approaches to the delivery of capacity-building in biosafety

8. The one submission made under this discussion thread noted that to effectively deliver capacity-building in biosafety, three different dimensions need to be considered: building awareness, building analytical capacity and building decision-making capacity. Each one is equally important and involves different stakeholder groups and requires a different strategy. Many activities that are currently offered through workshops, seminars, and conferences remain at an awareness-raising level. However, it is the analytical and decision-making capacities that are needed to sustain a constant process of change. Therefore, the delivery should remain focused on building analytical, decision-making and institutional capacities because these areas are more difficult to develop and monitor and will need holistic programmes using a wide range of capacity-building approaches.

E. Approaches to training and human resources development in biosafety

9. Three submissions were made under this discussion thread. In one of the submissions, it was noted that seminars and short-term training workshops are useful but often only provide general information about biosafety. Also, sometimes the participants selected are not directly involved in biosafety work or do not have formal and permanent employment with institutions dealing with biosafety. Thus it often happens that most participants in these workshops and seminars do not apply the knowledge and skills acquired through the workshops. Careful selection of participants is therefore very important.

10. It was also noted that a few years ago when biosafety was a new subject it was important and useful to conduct workshops and short-term training courses on biosafety to familiarize other professionals, such as biotechnologists, with biosafety. However, it is currently necessary to establish formal biosafety courses at graduate and postgraduate levels to train qualified experts in different aspects

of biosafety, for example, policymaking and regulatory control, risk assessment, risk management, liability and redress and other aspects. International e-learning training courses on biosafety could be used for training of lecturers who would in turn conduct similar biosafety courses at the national level.

11. In another submission, it was noted that the determination of the most effective approach to training and human resources development strongly depends on the specific objective to be achieved. A training workshop usually can go as far as building human capacities at an awareness-raising level. If specifically designed, training may also succeed in building analytical capacity. However, there is a tendency to call a wide range of activities “capacity-building” which rather are policy dialogues, discussion workshops, national meetings, etc. It takes much more for an adult to acquire new knowledge and skills than listening to a PowerPoint presentation in a workshop. In addition to seeing and listening, adults usually need real-life experiences to acquire new abilities. Thus, any workshop which is held with a capacity-building objective needs to be carefully designed, moving as much as possible from the presentation-discussion style to an interactive workshop style, using exercises, case-studies, field visits and other elements of experiential learning to actually build capacities. It was also suggested that the effectiveness of training activities could be further increased if workshops, instead of being just one-off events, are embedded in long-term programmes that reflect beneficiary countries’ priorities and use a range of capacity-building approaches in parallel.
