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PROTOCOL ON BIOSAFETY

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CAPACITY-BUILDING WORKSHOPS ON PUBLIC AWARENESS, EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION CONCERNING LIVING MODIFIED ORGANISMS

Note by the Executive Secretary

I. BACKGROUND

1. In its decision BS-V/13, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (COP-MOP) adopted a programme of work on public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms (LMOs) for the period 2011-2015. In this regard, the Secretariat organized two regional training workshops for Africa and Asia-Pacific to enhance the capacity of Parties and other Governments to implement the programme of work and to facilitate the sharing of relevant experiences and lessons learned. The relevant objectives of the workshop were as follows:

(a) To introduce participants to key concepts, tools and legal instruments relevant to public awareness, education, access to information, and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of LMOs;

(b) To facilitate exchange of information, experiences and lessons learned in promoting public awareness and education, access to information and participation concerning LMOs; and

(c) To discuss strategies for enhancing regional and subregional cooperation in the implementation of the programme of work on public awareness, education and participation at the national and regional levels.

2. Sections II and III of this note contain the summaries of the outcomes of two capacity-building workshops on public awareness, education and participation concerning LMOs that were held since the adoption of the programme of work.

II. SUMMARY OF THE OUTCOMES OF THE AFRICA REGIONAL CAPACITY-BUILDING WORKSHOP ON PUBLIC AWARENESS, EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION CONCERNING THE SAFE TRANSFER, HANDLING AND USE OF LIVING MODIFIED ORGANISMS

3. The Africa Regional Capacity-building Workshop on Public Awareness, Education and Participation Concerning the Safe Transfer, Handling and Use of LMOs was hosted by the Government of Uganda through the National Forestry Resources Research Institute, with funding from the Government of Japan, from 5 to 9 November 2012, in Kampala.

4. The workshop meeting was attended by 37 participants from 29 countries and 3 organizations.¹

5. Workshop participants identified elements of a national framework and action plan to facilitate public access to biosafety information and public participation in decision-making processes and made recommendations to facilitate regional cooperation on the implementation of Article 23 of the Protocol as follows:

Access to information

6. The following is a summary of the main points raised regarding key elements of a national framework and action plan for public access to information concerning LMOs:

(a) *Research and analysis:* There should be holistic stock-taking and analysis of the current situation regarding access to biosafety and environmental information. This could include an analysis through surveys and questionnaires. In particular, it is important to review laws, regulations, policies, guidelines, target audiences and administrative procedures;

(b) *Target audience:* Civil society (e.g. NGOs, consumers and farmer associations) in particular need to access biosafety information;

(c) *Capacity-building (legal and institutional frameworks) tactics:* Countries could consider the following: (i) develop and adopt a legal framework on ATI; (ii) put in place an institutional framework; (iii) develop a unit led by the Competent National Authority (CNA) to implement the legal framework; (iv) develop cross-cutting capacity-building initiatives, e.g. campaigns or training of government officials (e.g. ministers, senior executives, information agents) and other stakeholders; (v) make a list available of national experts on biosafety education and communication; (vi) hold training programs for biosafety educators and communicators at the national, regional and international level; and (vii) develop national systems to optimize the use of existing training tools and increase public awareness, education and public participation with regards to LMOs;

(d) *General tactics and methods:* Parties could consider the following activities: (i) employ a national e-governance system to effectively facilitate access to information; (ii) inform the public of its right to access to information; (iii) engage mass media; (iv) issue publications; (v) establish and/or maintain an information mechanism to record, retrieve and archive information (e.g. national BCH); (vi) inform and educate the public on how to access the Biosafety-clearing house (BCH); (vii) establish a mechanism for public announcements to inform the public about new information; and (viii) organize

¹ The report of the Africa Regional Capacity-building Workshop on Public Awareness, Education and Participation concerning the Safe Transfer, Handling and Use of LMOs is available in both English and French at <http://bch.cbd.int/protocol/meetings/documents.shtml?eventid=5140>.

online forums and public hearings to collect opinions and comments on the release of LMOs. Each of the tactics and methods would also need an appropriate budget. Further, it is essential to develop a matrix with key indicators of success for each activity to be evaluated;

(e) *Monitoring and evaluation:* Parties need to consider several monitoring and evaluation methods (including feedback mechanisms such as surveys or reviews by independent organizations). There is also a need for a list of ministries, departments and agencies that are able to monitor and evaluate strategies and plans. Reporting of the results could take place on a quarterly basis.

Public participation

7. The following is a synthesis of the views regarding elements of a national framework and action plan for public participation in decision-making concerning LMOs:

(a) *Research and analysis:* It is essential to conduct and analyze results of surveys on possible public concerns and level of public support, in particular prior to the first shipment of LMOs. In doing so, Parties could make use of opinion surveys. Parties could also consider establishing a project, including a project management committee, to conduct a stakeholder analysis. There is also a need to determine the level of public participation, such as engaging all stakeholders through a two-way communication process. Further, if a project is established, the project management committee could take a participatory approach to involve stakeholders, including local communities.

(b) *Objectives/goal:* The main objectives of the national action plan could be to: (i) involve the public in the decision-making process regarding LMOs; and/or (ii) minimize risks of the project failure and maximize the chances of project to succeed with regard to issues related to LMOs;

(c) *Target audience:* The national action plan could mainly include the following target audiences: government officials, industry, non-governmental organizations on a local, national and international level (e.g. consumer, farmer, women and youth associations), the media, academia and research communities, traditional leaders and strategic partners (e.g. donors).

(d) *Tactics (methods and tools):* There is a need to determine the methods and tools depending on the stage in implementing and developing the national action plan. The general tools could include opinion surveys or polls, workshops, public hearings, publications, seminars, websites and media. Parties could also use specific tools for specific issues including: (i) press release for LMO release applications processed; (ii) engaging the communities in which LMOs may be released regarding socio-economic issues; (iii) involving socio-economic consideration regarding risk assessment issues; (iv) preparing a stakeholder matrix; and (v) providing appropriate messages. Parties also need to assign coordinating roles and responsibilities for the following: a project management committee, engaging stakeholders, building strategic partners and addressing the concerned population.

(e) *Timeframe:* The three main timeframes may be as follows: (i) Development of the project Coordination - Step 1: 03 months; (ii) Development of the Project Management Committee - Step 2: 1 months; and (iii) Implementation of Project Activities - Step 3: ongoing.

(f) *Monitoring and Evaluation:* The following could be considered: (i) a mid-term evaluation; (ii) indicator reports on the percentage of the public involved in public consultation; (iii) other sources that can be used to validate outcomes (e.g. media coverage); and (iv) other types of audits.

Regional and subregional cooperation

8. The workshop participants discussed the role of the African Union in the implementation of the Protocol in general, and Article 23 in particular. With regard to former, the participants recommended to the African Union to:

- (a) Become a Party to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Cartagena Protocol.
- (b) Strengthen the mandate, structure and budget to implement the Cartagena Protocol; and
- (c) Enhance the networking among national focal points to the Cartagena Protocol;

9. With regard to Article 23, the participants recommended to the African Union to:

- (a) Take a lead role in promoting regional cooperation on implementing Article 23;
- (b) Identify clear synergies on the national and regional levels to implement Article 23;
- (c) Develop a regional action plan to promote biosafety awareness, education and participation, including access to information, taking into account national and subregional action plans;
- (d) Mobilize human and financial resources for the implementation of Article 23; and
- (e) Organize a high-level ministerial dialogue on issues related to biosafety and biotechnology to adopt a regional action plan on public awareness, education, access to information, and participation with regards to LMOs.

10. The following is a synthesis of the recommendations by the participants to Parties regarding strategies and activities for enhancing subregional cooperation on implementation of Article 23:

- (a) Collaborate to harmonize existing national laws and policies on public awareness, education, access to information, and participation concerning LMOs;
- (b) Strengthen capacities among scientists and media communicating biosafety and biotechnology issues;
- (c) Take stock of capacities, resources and experiences in order to exchange information on best practices and methods in communicating with the public;
- (d) Identify and cooperate with relevant regional and international bodies (e.g. networks, organizations and other platforms, including RAEIN-Africa and the Biosafety Clearing-House);
- (e) Establish a subregional online network with a relevant subregional organization;
- (f) Coordinate the development, implementation and evaluation of national and subregional action plans and frameworks as well as outreach strategies or communication plans, taking into account the outcomes from the workshop, in order to mobilize regional partnerships and financial resources;
- (g) Request the Executive Secretary to establish an information exchange platform (e.g. online forum for experts) to strengthen regional cooperation on public awareness, education, access to information, and participation concerning LMOs through the BCH;

- (i) Appoint two facilitators to moderate the discussions;
 - (ii) Designate national focal points to participate in the discussions;
 - (iii) Make available resource materials, including relevant laws and frameworks, regional notifications on events and a list of participants and other stakeholders; and
 - (iv) Establish, in parallel with the platform, social media (e.g. face book) sites.
- (h) Organize subregional meetings and workshops to provide guidance regarding the online exchange platform and facilitate the exchange of information, including identifying and sharing tools;
- (i) Enhance the facilitation of public access to information by: (i) establishing a national or subregional BCH website in areas where these mechanisms are non-existent; (ii) promoting the involvement of media to disseminate biosafety information; and (iii) strengthening political commitment to access biosafety information.
- (j) Facilitate a high-level dialogue involving ministries and Heads of States and Governments to increase the level of public awareness, education and participation with regards to biosafety issues; and
- (k) Enhance public participation in the decision-making process with regards to LMOs by: (i) collaborating with stakeholder on capacity-building initiatives (ii) developing and disseminating awareness materials; (iii) translating outreach materials into selected national languages; and (iv) enhancing public awareness and access to information for an effective public participation in the decision-making process of LMOs.

11. During the discussions the Secretariat suggested, and the participants agreed, that establishment of an online platform would help facilitate the exchange of information and experiences and foster regional and subregional cooperation with regard to implementation of Article 23 of the Protocol. For example, it would assist countries to share ideas and experiences in the development and implementation of their outreach strategies/communication plans or access to information action plans. In this regard, the Secretariat offered to create an online forum through the BCH and all participants agreed to join the forum by 31 December 2012. In addition, the following actions were agreed:

- (a) Two separate online discussion groups will be established for Anglophone and Francophone countries;
- (b) The participants will share their national outreach strategies/communication plans and national frameworks or action plans for promoting public access to information through the online portal;
- (c) The participants may wish to first submit their draft plans to the Secretariat for review and comment before posting them in the online portal; and
- (d) Each subregion will identify and designate a facilitator who will, among other things, moderate the online discussions and also contact and mobilize other officials/stakeholders who were not able to attend the workshop to participate in the online discussions.

12. The participants nominated Mr. Abisai Mafa (Zimbabwe) and Mr. Gado Zaki Mahaman (Niger) to serve as facilitators/moderators of the online forum for the Anglophone and Francophone countries, respectively.

13. The different subregions also nominated the following to serve as facilitators of the online discussions for the respective subregions through the platforms to be established on the BCH:

- (a) Eastern Africa: Uganda assisted by Sudan
- (b) Central Africa: Democratic Republic of the Congo
- (c) Southern Africa (SADC countries): Zimbabwe
- (d) West Africa (ECOWAS countries): Niger
- (e) North Africa: Morocco.

III. SUMMARY OF THE OUTCOMES OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL CAPACITY-BUILDING WORKSHOP ON PUBLIC AWARENESS, EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION CONCERNING THE SAFE TRANSFER, HANDLING AND USE OF LIVING MODIFIED ORGANISMS

14. The Asia-Pacific regional capacity-building workshop on public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of LMOs was hosted by the Government of Viet Nam through the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, with funding from the Government of Japan, from 25 to 29 March 2013, in Hanoi, Viet Nam.

15. The workshop meeting was attended by 32 participants from 29 countries and 3 organizations. ²

16. With a view to promoting regional and subregional cooperation on the implementation of Article 23 of the Protocol, including the programme of work, the participants of the workshop made the following recommendations:

- (a) Establish an Asia-Pacific regional online network on public awareness, education and participation concerning LMOs which would be open to interested intergovernmental non-governmental organisations and members of the public;
- (b) Set up an e-mail list serve for stakeholders involved or interested in public awareness, education and participation concerning LMOs;
- (c) Conduct surveys to collect relevant information concerning LMOs and the status of biosafety in the region;
- (d) Develop and exchange guidelines and other resource materials produced in the region;
- (e) Request the Secretariat of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to play a central role in promoting public awareness, education and participation concerning LMOs;
- (f) Share information on LMOs including on national regulations;

² The report of the Asia-Pacific regional training workshop on public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of LMOs is available at <http://bch.cbd.int/protocol/meetings/documents.shtml?eventid=5215>.

(g) Organize joint training activities on public awareness, education and participation concerning LMOs;

(h) Invite the South Asia Cooperative Environmental Program (SACEP) to contribute to facilitating exchange of information on biosafety;

(i) Establish a Roster of Experts on Biosafety within the Asia-Pacific region;

(j) Promote exchange programmes for public servants and scientists; and

(k) Establish a regional database on ongoing biosafety activities in different countries.

17. As a follow up to the above recommendations, the Secretariat offered to establish a portal for the Asia-Pacific Regional Network on Public Awareness, Education and Participation Concerning LMOs (Asia-Pacific PAEP Network) through the Biosafety Clearing-House.
