

BIOSAFETY PROTOCOL NEWS

2017/2018 ● Issue 13

**Joint Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety/
Aarhus Convention Cooperation on
Public Access to Information and Public Participation**



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BIOSAFETY PROTOCOL NEWS

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BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT - HANDS HOLDING SEEDLING IN A GROUP/ISTOCKPHOTOS

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- 3 Introduction
by Ella Behlyarova and Cristiana Paşca Palmer
- 4 Experiences and Lessons Learned on an International Level and from Austria
by Helmut Gaugitsch
- 6 Experiences and Lessons Learned from Georgia
by Nino Gokhelashvili and Nona Khelaia
- 8 Experiences and Lessons Learned from Guatemala
by Leslie Melisa Ojeda Cabrera
- 10 Experiences and Lessons Learned from Guinea Bissau
by Mário Batista Camala and Alfredo Simão da Silva
- 12 Experiences and Lessons Learned from Namibia
by Martha Kandawa-Schulz, Lavinia Mbongo, Paulus Mungeyi and Vincent Nowaseb
- 14 Experiences and Lessons Learned from the Philippines
by Julieta Fe L. Estacio
- 16 Experiences and Lessons Learned from Serbia
by Vanja Kojić, Gordana Petkovic and Aleksiej Tarasjev
- 18 Experiences and lessons learned from Tunisia
by Raja Chalhouni, Hatem Ben Belgacem and Sana Jaballah
- 20 Useful Information
- 21 Statistics and Other Information
- 23 Recent and Upcoming Biosafety Events



Convention on
Biological Diversity



Introduction

by **Ella Behlyarova and Cristiana Paşca Palmer** ●

Ms. Behlyarova, Secretary to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention)

Ms. Palmer, Executive Secretary, the Convention on Biological Diversity



Dear Readers,

The 2017 – 2018 issue of the **Biosafety Protocol News** is significant as it marks both the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Aarhus Convention, hosted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, and ten years of collaboration between the secretariats of the Aarhus Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Through numerous joint activities countries have been assisted in implementing the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety as instruments to facilitate transparency and public participation in decision-making related to genetically/living modified organisms (GMOs/LMOs).

A well-informed public, which is effectively participating in decision-making, can make better decisions regarding the use of genetic resources and on what is healthy and safe for consumption and to the environment. To make this happen, a number of measures need to be implemented to address challenges associated with raising public awareness, providing access to accurate and reliable information regarding the release of LMOs/GMOs, and also with building capacities of public authorities in carrying out public participation procedures related to risk assessment and risk management of LMOs/GMOs.

The joint activities carried out under the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol assist countries to address these challenges. The activities include conducting online fora and capacity-building meetings, and developing e-learning modules and guidance materials. The joint work also provides an opportunity to conduct regular stocktaking exercises to identify countries' needs regarding tools, financial capacity and training activities for developing legislation and procedures for effective access to information and public participation.

Furthermore, the joint activities are encouraging collaboration at the national level between focal points of both the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol. These efforts are in particular important in light of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals related to natural resources and ecosystems, food security, sustainable consumption and production, improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture. Achieving these Goals is only possible if concrete measures are taken through partnerships between different sectors and stakeholders to raise awareness, involve the public, build capacities and facilitate the exchange of expertise in the field of LMOs/GMOs.

This newsletter includes contributions prepared by focal points of both instruments thereby showing how collaborative efforts turn goals into concrete actions leading to tangible results. The contributions also confirm that the collaboration between the two instruments is essential for promoting transparency and public participation in decision-making processes regarding LMOs/GMOs.



Experiences and lessons learned on an international level

by **Helmut Gaugitsch** • National Focal Point of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Aarhus Convention, including the Chair of the first and second joint CBD/Aarhus Convention Round tables. He can be reached at: helmut.gaugitsch@umweltbundesamt.at



Austria has a long history of engaging in issues regarding genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and biosafety, in the context of joint collaborative initiatives of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Aarhus Convention with its GMO Amendment and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The engagement is rooted in Austria's practice to regard public access to information and public participation as good practice in the area of biosafety. Consequently, Austria was very pleased to again have the honour to chair the second joint Aarhus Convention/Cartagena Protocol global round table on access to information and public participation regarding living modified organisms (LMOs)/GMOs after having chaired previous similar events.

The second round table took place in Geneva from 15 to 17 November 2016, under the auspices of the UNECE Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol. Delegates from a number of Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol and stakeholders from intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations attended the round table. I reported on the results to the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Aarhus Convention, which took place from 11 to 15 September 2017 in Budva, Montenegro. The report was well received by the delegations at the meeting.

Discussions at the round table meeting successfully led to sharing of knowledge, good practices and lessons learned on access to information, awareness raising and education, public participation as well as mechanisms for co-operation in the field of LMOs/GMOs. It proved particularly useful to involve experts outside the UNECE region as the interplay with the Cartagena Protocol and its Programme of Work on public awareness, education and public participation, including access to information (Article 23 under the Cartagena Protocol) played a strong and inspiring role in the discussions. In addition, an interactive element in the round table provided an excellent opportunity to network, hold bilateral discussions and select priority elements for further concrete actions.

As a result, the Chair's summary at the end of the report contains all the recommendations on concrete steps for a way forward. The key recommendations are as follows:

- First, to continue to strengthen coordination and cooperation between national focal points of both the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol;
- Second, to make use of the Aarhus Centers or other relevant organizations with a view to strengthen the capacities of national authorities in order to ratify the GMO Amendment and the Cartagena Protocol;
- Third, to make use of all available guidance materials, especially the checklist of key measures developed recently which are required for ratification of the two instruments¹;
- Fourth, to provide training materials in order to assist Parties to integrate biosafety issues into other national policies and programs²;
- Fifth, to develop a "pocket guide" describing the benefits and challenges to promote transparency and public participation in LMO/GMO related matters;
- And finally, to organize a similar joint round table during the next intersessional period of the two instruments and thereby support their implementation in the context of LMOs and GMOs.

If the recommendations are met, it would promote essential outcomes related to ratifications, implementation and capacity-building under the two instruments.

It is very important that those countries that have not done so yet make all efforts to ratify and implement the GMO Amendment to the Aarhus Convention. Parties are also invited to offer bilateral assistance and partner organizations³ to initiate country projects on capacity-building related to GMOs/LMOs, aiming at ratifying the GMO Amendment and implementing the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol in synergy.

¹The checklist is available at http://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_art23/pa_main.shtml

²Two joint training materials are e-learning modules on access to information and public participation available at <https://scbd.unssc.org/course/index.php?categoryid=9>

³The partners could be the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe - OSCE and the United Nations Development Programme - UNDP



PHOTO CREDIT: ALFRED LEX, WIEN, 1. BEZIRK (THE ART OF VERY HISTORIC PLACES IN THE CORE OF DOWNTOWN VIENNA), RATHAUSPLATZ/UNIVERSITÄTSRING
(VIENNA ICE DREAM 2017 (BURGTHEATER AND TOWN COUNCIL), REVE SUR LA GLACE, SUEÑOS SOBRE HIELO, I SOGNI DI GHIACCIO VIENNESI)¹⁹

Presentations from Parties of the two instruments and discussions at the round table clearly identified future needs for concrete training activities in appropriate formats financed in bilateral and multilateral settings.

In addition, a side-event was organized at the margins of the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention in September 2017 by the two secretariats on “Building capacity for public participation to effectively implement the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Aarhus Convention in the context of LMOs/GMOs”. Presentations from Parties of the two instruments and discussions from participants clearly identified future needs for concrete training activities in appropriate formats, such as e-learning tools, webinars, face-to-face meetings and co-operation. Such capacity-building and training activities were advised to be implemented and financed in bilateral and multilateral settings.

In conclusion

The discussions at the second round table on access to information and public participation were very constructive, focused and results-oriented. All participants provided dedicated input to the round table through presentations or other inputs. The Secretariats of the Aarhus Convention and Convention on Biological Diversity took care of an efficient and experienced organization of the round table as well as provided assistance during and after the event. It was a remarkable example of successful synergy.

As Chair of the event, my assessment is that the second round table has proved to be a very important milestone to further practical development and implementation of mechanisms for the public participation and access to information in the area of GMOs and biosafety. Austria is honored to continue leading joint Aarhus Convention/ Cartagena Protocol collaborative efforts and the work on GMOs under the Aarhus Convention, of course depending on the concrete activities and subject to budgetary approval.

Finally, I would like to underline that transparency, awareness raising, education and public participation in the context of biodiversity and biosafety is critical for the implementation of a number of Sustainable Development Goals and their targets. I, therefore, would like to take this opportunity and strongly encourage Parties and other interested countries to participate in the next joint round table, which will inevitably address this matter. 🇦🇹

Experiences and Lessons Learned from Georgia

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Introduction

In 2008, Georgia acceded to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity. In 2016, Georgia ratified the genetically modified organisms (GMO) Amendment to the Aarhus Convention. Further, the use of living modified organisms (LMOs)/GMOs is regulated by the Law of Georgia on LMOs (2014), Food Products/Animal Feed Safety, Veterinary and Plant Protection Code (2012) and the Law of Georgia on the Labelling of GMOs and their Derived Genetically Modified Products Intended for Use as Food/Feed (2014), as well as other related bylaws. As the national legislation declared the territory of Georgia an LMO-free zone in 2016, the country only regulates transit and contained use of LMOs.

Further, MENRP is also the responsible authority for making information available in the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) as part of its obligations under the Protocol. MENRP is planning on developing an LMO unified registry with information on contained use of LMOs according to the national legislation. Licenses of contained use of LMOs issued by MENRP will also be available in the registry. The national legislation has already set in place the functions and rules for the registry. However, no license was issued yet.

In addition, Georgia incorporated into the national legislation principles of public access to sufficient and reliable information in a timely manner and principles of public participation in the decision-making process regarding LMOs/GMOs in order to protect the public's interest and to ensure the public's freedom of choice in these fields. The state institutions authorized to carry out LMO/GMO related activities are as follows:

Access to Information and Public Participation

With regards to adherence to procedures to promote access to information and public participation in the decision-making process regarding LMOs, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia (MENRP) first issues the required license of contained use of LMOs and then publishes applications of LMOs, including the applicant's submission of documents. After that, the public is authorized to submit their opinions in writing within twenty days. MENRP must also hold a public hearing no later than seven days after the submissions of the public's written comments. In addition, within ten days after a decision is made, information about the approval or denial of the license is published in the official publishing agency in Georgia.

Regarding transit of LMOs, Georgia meets the requirements of the Cartagena Protocol. In particular, it takes measures with regards to handling, transport, packaging and identification of LMOs when transporting LMOs through its territory. The country also takes measures with regards to facilitating access to information and public participation of these LMOs.

- In accordance with the Cartagena Protocol, MENRP carries out the functions of the state coordination center and Competent National Authority under the Cartagena Protocol within its competence. It also conducts state management in the field of GMOs; issues the license for contained use of LMOs; administers a unified LMO registry; and makes decisions on transit of LMOs;
- Within its competence, the Ministry of Agriculture manages state regulation in the field of GMOs; and
- The Ministry of Finance, which carries out customs and border controls regarding transboundary movements of GMOs, as well as management of regulations related to GMO products.



PHOTO CREDIT: PAUL BRENNAN/PIXABAY

Conclusion

It is a reality that LMO/GMO related issues are one of the most challenging topics in our society today. Therefore, bearing in mind our obligations and responsibilities, we all have to ensure the safe transfer, handling and use of LMOs/GMOs.

First, it is necessary to improve and develop relevant regulatory frameworks, implement mechanisms, and establish appropriate procedures for the safe use of LMOs/GMOs, including ensuring access to information and public participation regarding LMOs/GMOs. This is not an easy task. Thus, close cooperation between the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety is necessary both at the national and international levels.

At the national level, co-operation should be carried out with a close partnership between the national focal points of the Aarhus Convention and Cartagena Protocol in order to ensure that exchange of information takes place to coordinate joint activities.

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At the international level, cooperation between the two secretariats of the Aarhus Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity should support collaboration among all Parties and all other interested stakeholders in order to exchange good practices and experience. They should also promote capacity-building activities and technical assistance to all stakeholders. Accordingly, collaboration with the international community and active participation in LMO/GMO-related international processes and fora is of utmost importance. ❏

Experiences and Lessons Learned from Guatemala

by Leslie Melisa Ojeda Cabrera ● Biosafety Clearing-House Focal Point
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Guatemala is part of the group of Like-Minded Megadiverse Countries (LMMC) with rich biodiversity and cultural diversity. The country is located in the heart of Mesoamerica, one of the world's most important centers of origin and diversity of crop plants. The country also thrives on wild relatives of native crops. These crops are also increasingly important to the world's agricultural use because they contain beneficial traits needed for improvement of crops. The improvements may include: disease, pest and drought resistant crops; higher nutritional values; and the capability of adapting to changing environments due to climate change. Indigenous peoples and local communities play an important role in this matter. Their interaction with biodiversity drives the domestication process in order to obtain commercially suitable products. An example is the domestication process of teosinte in corn, which has become one of the most important crops in the world. Corn for the Mayan people is very important as well as for Guatemala's staple food. The high genetic diversity of corn in the country includes at least 19 corn varieties and two wild species. The gastronomic richness consists of corn-based tortillas, tamales and many other home-made products used either as food or for ceremonial rites. To date, corn is highlighted as the Natural and Cultural Patrimony of the Nation in the Decree 13-2014 and is celebrated on 13 August as the National Day of Maize.

Introduction

Using products from modern biotechnology is beneficial for applications related to agronomy. However, many groups in society are influenced by controversial information in different media regarding the use of transgenic crops, in particular transgenic corn. As a result, the Competent National Authorities (CNAs) designated under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in Guatemala have made efforts to resolve the main challenges. The CNAs, among others, are disseminating accurate and impartial information relating to living modified organisms (LMOs) resulting from modern biotechnology¹.

Opportunities and results

Since Guatemala ratified the Cartagena Protocol on 28 October 2004, it has participated in a series of projects supported by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). One project was the Development of Biosafety Mechanisms to Strengthen the Implementation of the Cartagena Protocol in Guatemala². The main outcome of the project was the National Biosafety Policy for Living Modified Organisms (2013-2023)³. The policy, in particular, promotes recommendations for capacity-building related to access to information.

Further, in 2009, Guatemala operationalized the national portal on biosafety that includes the national Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH-Guatemala⁴) to enhance implementation of Article 20 and 23 of the Cartagena Protocol. The national BCH contains access to a compilation of information on biosafety issues. For example, there are documents on laws and other legal instruments related to LMOs and biosafety, national reports, biotechnology articles, events and a free interactive course on biosafety. Recently, social networks (e.g. a Facebook site⁵) were also integrated into the national BCH in order to increase the accessibility of information and to interact with users. After eight years of operation, it is now necessary to develop a new portal to update the content management system with new and improve sections. The goal is to provide the best experience for users and providers to access information by launching a new BCH Guatemala this year.

The BCH Guatemala also provides access to important booklets and other publications. The most downloadable booklets are entitled: Natives Crops of Guatemala and Biosafety⁶. These are a series of booklets with information on nine Mesoamerican crops and one crop of Asian origin, all of these with the presence of wild crop relatives. The crops have the required baseline for environmental risk analysis and the conservation of wild relatives. Another interesting publication is the book for sixth graders in elementary school, entitled: Biosafety, Biotechnology and Biodiversity⁷, published in particular for students between 10 to 12 years old. The material provides first-hand information on molecular biology and biotechnology and its relationship to the environment and biodiversity. It is also based on exercises to develop critical thinking.

¹The CNAs also initiate processes to develop and implement initiatives to create laws and other norms to prevent risks derived from the use of modern biotechnology products; and ensure the conservation of genetics resources of native corn and its link to traditional knowledge.

²The project documents is available at: <https://goo.gl/IVFnyc>

³The National Biosafety Policy for LMOs (2013-2023) is available at:

<https://goo.gl/TfYA5z>

⁴The national BCH is available at: <http://www.bchguatemala.gob.gt/>

⁵The Facebook site is available at: <https://www.facebook.com/bchguatemala/>

⁶The "Natives Crops of Guatemala and Biosafety" is available at: <https://goo.gl/36qUhn> and <https://goo.gl/3dAPWQ>

⁷The publication is available at: <https://goo.gl/Kvcby9>

During the round table, it was evident that there is a need for joint initiatives and training activities.

Recommendations

Guatemala had the opportunity to join the second round table on public awareness, access to information and public participation regarding LMOs/genetically modified organisms (GMOs) organized in Geneva from 15 to 17 November 2016, under the auspices of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol. During the round table, it was evident that there is a need for joint initiatives and training activities. In particular priority areas or activities include biosafety education, procedures for access to information and programs for gender equality to further promote public participation.

As also recommended in the round table, it would be useful to organize a similar round table in the next intersessional period of the two treaties so as to allow Parties to both instruments from different regions to exchange experiences, thereby supporting implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in the context of LMOs/GMOs in synergy, and to further explore opportunities to allocate funds also for participation of representatives of non-ECE countries.⁸

Also noted during the round table, it is essential that Guatemala and other megadiverse countries in the Latin American region identify lessons learned and address challenges by setting new goals on access to information and public participation procedures regarding LMOs resulting from modern biotechnology.

The National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP) included in a national legal framework, the National Biosafety Policy of Living Modified Organisms 2013-2023⁹, biosafety issues to, among other things, ensure international financial support for new initiatives and to implement the Cartagena Protocol in the country. This is a great opportunity for Guatemala and similar initiatives could be promoted in other countries as many countries face an enormous demographic growth as in Guatemala. At present, Guatemala's population is more than 15 million. It demands all kinds of services, in particular food supplies. As a country with agricultural needs, Guatemala should produce all the food required for its population. Biotechnology, from the perspective of its benefits, represents a real opportunity to support the agricultural production while ensuring the safe use of its products.

Further, the BCH has to be a tool to facilitate the access to information and public participation. As such, it is crucial to improve its capacity to reach more users and to tailor its content to a broader public that is not specialized in the topic of biosafety.

⁸Report on the second joint round table is available at: <https://goo.gl/G5vKM3>

⁹The National Biosecurity Policy of Living Modified Organisms 2013-2023 is available at:

<https://goo.gl/TfYA5z>



PHOTO CREDIT: TERRY LIANN MORRIS, HANDMADE CORN TOITILLAS GUATEMALA

Experiences and Lessons Learned from Guinea-Bissau

by **Mário Batista Camala and Alfredo Simão da Silva** ● Camala, National Focal Point of the Aarhus Convention, can be reached at: aarhusnfp.guineabissau@gmail.com. Simão da Silva, National Focal Point for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, can be reached at: alfredodasilva.ibap@gmail.com



Introduction

To address the concerns regarding the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), Guinea-Bissau ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, 19 May 2010. Since then, the rapid growth of GMO crops that affected the country has called the attention of national authorities. However, these authorities are also increasingly confronted with issues relating to food production to meet the basic needs of the population. The present contribution summarizes the reality at the national level with regard to setting up a system on access to information and public participation to ensure safe transfer, handling and use of GMOs.

Legal aspects relating to access to information and public participation regarding GMOs in Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau has developed policy and legal instruments related to the safe transfer, handling and use of GMOs. Some instruments are, among others: the National Biosafety Framework (NBF); the Legal Regime for the Use of Modern Biotechnology; and the Communication Strategy for the Implementation of the West African Economic and Monetary Union's (UEMOA) Subregional Biosafety Program for GMOs. The instruments are mechanisms that are implemented, for example, by the Competent National Authority (CNA), designated under the Cartagena Protocol, to promote access to information relating to GMOs to any interested stakeholder, either through setting up tools for information upon request or through facilitating public awareness activities. These instruments also facilitate the involvement of different stakeholders during the decision-making process regarding GMOs.

The instruments aim, among other things, to provide guidelines on how to implement national policy on biotechnology and biosafety as follows:

With regard to the NBF and promoting access to information, information specialists, in collaboration with academics, makes available information to the general public not only through the media (e.g. radio, television, newspapers) but also through public debates and training activities with different communities, taking into account the diversity of the target audience and the format of the message. Regarding public participation, the NBF foresees the need to involve different public departments and civil society (e.g. NGOs and other community-based organizations), in close connection with communities to ensure an effective decision-making process regarding GMOs and the publishing of final decisions in the official bulletin.

With regards to the Legal Regime for the Use of Modern Biotechnology, (approved by the Decree no. 2/2013 on 11 July 2013), it is stated in Article 8 that there is an obligation to provide the concerned public with the possibility to participate effectively, in a timely and appropriate manner (e.g. forums at which GMO issues are discussed and final decisions are taken). In the Decree's Article 9, on the other hand, public bodies are required to provide information upon request, and to create mechanisms to adequately provide information to all consumers and other interested parties (e.g. either individually or through a website, or other available communication channels that are considered more convenient).

With regards to the Communication Strategy for the Implementation of UEMOA's Subregional Biosafety Program for GMOs, it outlines that decisions related to GMOs are only effective with the involvement of the public during the different stages of the decision-making process regarding GMOs. The public must be informed of imports of GMOs since it is the public that guides public policies and the entire decision-making process regarding GMOs.



PHOTO CREDIT: CHRISTINE VAUFREY, KING'S MEETING

Administrative structures relating to GMOs

The administrative structures relating to GMOs in Guinea-Bissau is laid out in Article 3 of the Decree No. 2/2013 on the Legal Regime for the use of Modern Biotechnology. In other words, in accordance with the above-mentioned article, the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, as the CNAs, are responsible for the definition, implementation and monitoring of policies related to biosafety issues. The responsibilities also include providing a definition of mechanisms for access to information and public participation regarding GMOs.

However, it should be noted that decisions related to GMOs are made jointly through the National Commission for Biosafety and other public departments as well as civil society. In addition, the National Commission for Biosafety has established a technical committee with the goal of raising awareness as well as promoting education and involving the public in the decision-making process regarding GMOs.

In addition to the aforementioned body, the National Biosafety Program also has the same functions as the above mentioned Ministry. The body was established as a result of implementing the Cartagena Protocol.

For the West-African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) initiatives, we participated in forums that discussed GMO issues that allowed us to exchange experiences with other countries relating to GMO issues.

Conclusion

To conclude, Guinea-Bissau is well equipped with instruments established to implement Article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol as well as the Aarhus Convention and its GMO Amendment. To continue to implement the instruments, the country promotes the exchange of information among countries. Both instruments can also facilitate this in synergy.

Guinea-Bissau is well equipped with instruments established to implement Article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol as well as the Aarhus Convention and its GMO Amendment.

Since 2011, the Government of Guinea-Bissau has organized, through the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development and other structures, workshops and door-to-door campaigns on GMOs. The initiatives involved information on policy instruments related to GMOs that were developed with the participation of many stakeholders. 🗣️

Experiences and Lessons Learned from Namibia

by Martha Kandawa-Schulz,
Vincent Nowaseb, Lavinia Mbongo and
Paulus Mungeyi

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Introduction

Namibia recognizes modern biotechnology as an important tool in fighting hunger and malnutrition and as a solution for alternative food sources in the face of climate change. However, all stakeholders must address the controversial and pervasive concerns regarding the safety and the effects on human health and the environment arising from the use of living modified organisms (LMOs). To address the benefits and risks, the Government of Namibia ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity on 10 February 2005 and established the Biosafety Act in 2006 (Act no. 7, 2006).

With the support from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the National Commission on Research, Science and Technology (NCRST), the Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Innovation and the University of Namibia conducted a survey, from August 2013 to April 2014, to generate baseline data on biotechnology and biosafety awareness levels. The results show that there is a need to promote access to information regarding genetically modified organisms (GMOs) which will also improve public participation regarding GMOs. In making informed decisions, Parties should set up mechanisms as per Article 23 with regards to public participation and access to information under the Cartagena Protocol and the GMO Amendment of the Aarhus Convention.

The Aarhus Convention could financial or technical assist non-European countries by first becoming a party to the Aarhus Convention.

Awareness Survey

The survey targeted a total of 100 individuals as a selected group from government departments, non-government organizations, academia and the public from different regions of a sampled population. From all the 14 Namibian regions, 54 % of the sampled population indicated that they were not familiar with either the concept of biosafety nor biotechnology, while 66 % confirmed that there is a need to raise awareness of issues related to biotechnology and biosafety.

Integration of public inputs into final decisions

Promoting public participation regarding GMOs could ensure better transparency and accountability in decision making relating to GMOs. As per the Biosafety Act, 2006 (Act No. 7 of 2006), public inputs are taken into account in the application process of GMO permits. Through public hearings and written submissions, the inputs provide information to make final decisions relating to GMOs.

So far, Namibia's approach is to target specific audiences in promoting public participation in order to implement Article 23. In doing so, it facilitates a receptive change in both attitude and behavior from specific audiences regarding issues related to biosafety. The approach facilitates informed decision-making reflecting the audience's societal goals, traditions, morals and ethics through an open and interactive platform.

National public awareness strategy to promote public participation

From a public awareness survey, in which 66 % of the sampled population demonstrated that there was a need to increase public awareness by promoting access to information and public participation, Namibia developed a public awareness strategy on biosafety. The overall goal of the strategy is to disseminate information related to GMOs and to encourage public participation regarding GMOs¹. The strategy is key in encouraging informed decisions during the implementation of the national biosafety framework in Namibia. The level of public participation will also increase since the public is in many ways impacted as end-users of GMOs².

¹The objectives of the strategy are to: Increase awareness and enhance understanding of biosafety issues among target groups; Facilitate greater understanding of biosafety issues that lead to an increase of informed target groups; and Engage partnerships to actively participate in raising awareness of biosafety issues to improve collaborative initiatives.

² The Target Groups and Partners are to ensure the successful implementation of the strategy, it is necessary to determine the main target groups and partners. These groups are as follows: politicians and policy-makers, technical staff and competent national authorities, farmers and manufacturers/processors, educational institutions (e.g. schools and universities at the primary, secondary and tertiary level), media and the general public.

Incorporation of Biosafety in University Curricula

Incorporating biosafety in university curricula is also a method to promote public participation in the decision-making process regarding GMOs. Biosafety is therefore offered as an elective course for biological science students at the University of Namibia³.

Countrywide Outreach Programs and Information Workshops

The NCRST has established outreach programs to increase public visibility and awareness of the Biosafety Act, 2006 (Act No. 7 of 2006), the biosafety regulations to implement the Biosafety Act as well as the biosafety guidelines and procedures. The programs aim at informing and educating different target audiences about the framework as well as to engage, motivate and build collaborative partnerships. To date, NCRST has reached all 14 regions in Namibia in building capacity of individuals and institutions that will be involved in the implementation of the Biosafety Act with assistance the UNEP-GEF project. Sixty-two percent of the participants (Figure 3.) demonstrated their overall satisfaction and willingness to be instrumental in supporting public awareness-raising and education. Further, promotional materials and leaflets containing biosafety information were distributed to the public during public information workshops.

Further, to make effective use of media and to leverage opportunities for cooperation in promoting public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of GMOs, national media houses are regularly invited to support regional and national initiatives in order to share information through print media and broadcasting media (e.g. radio stations and national television).

National Biosafety Clearing-House

Namibia has endeavored to inform its public about access to information through the national Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH)⁴. First, the national BCH was developed with the assistance of a UNEP-GEF project to implement Agenda 21 (Chapter 16 regarding environmentally sound management of biotechnology)⁵. Secondly, the public was informed about the BCH during public information workshops in all regions in the country.

The accessible information in the national BCH includes information on members of the biosafety council, legislations, guidelines, permit applications of GMOs, country decisions, approved GMO products, national contacts of the Cartagena Protocol and emergency measures relating to GMOs. The BCH is also used as a tool to evaluate outcomes of biotechnology workshops. Further, biosafety council members and co-implementing national institutions have been trained on the use of the BCH⁶.



PHOTO CREDIT: CHRIS RING, OASIS

Recommendations

Although Namibia strives to support its citizens to access information and to enable an inclusive public participation system, a challenge is the lack of financial resources, technical capacities and infrastructure for information and communications technology (ICT). So far, much of the available resources are used to translate scientific and technical information into local languages. These factors have led to the low level of awareness and access to information regarding GMOs among decision-makers and the public. In relation to international instruments, the Aarhus Convention could assist in providing financial or technical resources at the regional and international levels for non-European countries. This could be achieved by becoming a party to the Aarhus Convention. In this regard, it would reduce the limited public participation and the low level of access to information regarding GMOs in Namibia⁷.

⁷More references for the articles can also be found from:

-Aarhus, 1998, The Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. Aarhus, Denmark.

-Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2000), Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity: text and annexes. Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

-Government Gazette, Republic of Namibia, 2006, Biosafety Act, Namibia.

-United Nation Environmental Programme – Global Environment Facility, NCRST Ministry of Education, and the University of Namibia, 2014, Namibia Public Awareness on Biotechnology, Windhoek, Namibia.

-National Commission on Research, Science and Technology, 2016, Public Awareness Strategy on Biosafety, Windhoek, Namibia.

-Aarhus Convention and Convention on Biological Diversity secretariats, 2017, Report on the second joint round table on public awareness, access to information and public participation regarding living modified organisms/genetically modified organisms, Geneva, Switzerland. Available at http://www.unepce.org/env/pp/grt_lmo_gmo_2016

³The curricula of the biosafety elective course is available at http://www.unam.edu.na/sites/default/files/newsletter/faculty_of_science_prospectus_2018.pdf

⁴The national BCH is available at <http://bch.ncrst.na/>

⁵Agenda 21, chapter 16 is available at <http://www.un-documents.net/a21-16.htm>

⁶The Namibia BCH is available at: <http://bch.ncrst.na/>

Experiences and Lessons Learned from the Philippines

by **Julieta Fe L. Estacio** • Biosafety-Clearing House Focal Point. She can be reached at: estaciojulietafe@gmail.com



Introduction

Since the mid-seventies, genetic engineering has been an innovation that met a lot of skepticism from various groups around the world. The process and products of genetic engineering have become very controversial. The impacts to the environment, as well as the impacts to human and animal health, have also been continuously questioned. Based on this, the Philippines established a responsive biosafety regulatory system as early as 1987.

In 1990, an Executive Order established the National Committee on Biosafety of the Philippines (NCBP) to be the lead body in developing procedures and guidelines on activities relating to modern biotechnology. In 2000, the Philippines signed the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and in 2006 the country ratified it. This expanded its responsibilities to enhance public participation and access to information procedures and practices.

Strengthening Public Participation and

Access to Information

Public access to information and participation are components of decision-making in the country's National Biosafety Framework (NBF). The Philippines has set in place a system for access to information and public participation regarding LMOs/GMOs.

Regarding public participation, mechanisms and best practices are incorporated in the administrative systems of government departments involved in handling issues related to LMOs/GMOs. The initiatives apply to all stages of the decision-making process regarding GMOs/LMOs, from the time applications are received to the final decisions.

The process also includes, among other things:

- Institutional Biosafety Committees selecting members, who are elected local government officials or an accredited non-governmental organization (NGO);
- Public hearings prior to field trial of LMOs/GMOs;
- Public information sheets published in bulletin boards of local units and information in three newspapers that are part of the general circulation;
- Public comments for a time period of 30 days; and
- Consideration of public concerns in the decision-making process regarding LMOs/GMOs.

Regarding access to information, several methods using various tools are facilitated, among others the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH) Pilipinas (known as the "BCH Pilipinas") that was established in 2008. The BCH Pilipinas was established based on Article 20 of the Cartagena Protocol. The BCH Pilipinas serves as a mechanism to exchange information between providers and users of biosafety information in a transparent, accurate and timely manner. It is also a mechanism for collaboration among regulatory agencies and their partners in providing information services to public and private research institutions, civil society organizations and other stakeholders involved in biosafety issues. Further, the Competent National Authorities (CNAs) of the Cartagena Protocol upload information from the BCH Pilipinas to the Central Portal of the BCH.

In addition, the Philippines is part of the Asia BCH Family (ABF), a network officially launched in December 2016 during the eighth meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol (COP-MOP 8) in Cancun, Mexico. The ABF implements the four focal areas of the Asia BCH Roadmap relating to: Compliance with the NBF and Cartagena Protocol; Enhancement of regional networking and cooperation; promotion of public awareness, education and information; and Building capacity towards effective participation to the BCH. The implementation of the focal areas was coordinated by the Philippines from 2016 to 2017.

Further, relevant stakeholders also have different methods in promoting public access to information. These include, among other things:

- Applications of LMOs/GMOs published in agency websites;
- Confidential information being protected;
- Biosafety decisions uploaded in the BCH; and
- Information on risk assessment and management of LMOs and handling, transport, packaging and identification of LMOs shared in the BCH.

In addition, capacity-building activities for relevant stakeholders with biosafety partners are also held in order to educate stakeholders on modern biotechnology and biosafety. The stakeholders are, among others, farmers, students, scientists, and other relevant sectors of society. For example, an activity is to provide biotechnology and biosafety materials in schools for the younger population.

As modern biotechnology progress, there is a constant need for innovative initiatives and involvement of more stakeholders in the regulatory process. A challenge for the Philippines is to harmonize the procedures of each government agency involved in the regulation so that guidelines for public participation can be institutionalized. Further, the regulators must also be made aware of the power of media in enhancing public participation and trusting the government's regulatory process.

In this regard, the Philippines will continue these initiatives towards building capacity for public access to information and public participation regarding the safe transfer, handling and use of LMOs/GMOs.

In conclusion

In conclusion, the Philippines finds it important to promote access to information and public participation in the decision-making process regarding LMOs/GMOs and will continue its efforts to uphold its policy and transparency by facilitating systems for access to information and public participation.

This can be done through continued work in reviewing its biosafety administrative system to ensure that the products of modern biotechnology are, for example, thoroughly assessed and used responsibly taking into account their impacts to the environment as well as human and animal health.

The Philippines finds it important to promote access to information and public participation in the decision-making process regarding LMOs/GMOs and will continue its efforts to uphold its policy and transparency by facilitating systems for access to information and public participation.

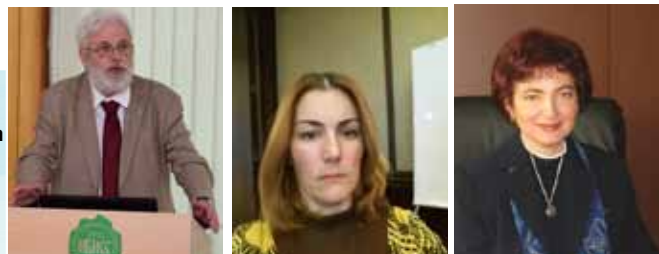
We would also like to thank the Aarhus Convention and the SCBD for being able to participate in the second joint round table to exchange information on systems of access to information and public participation relevant to both the instruments. 🏡



RICHARD McALL/PIXABAY

Experiences and Lessons Learned from Serbia

by **Tarasjev Aleksej, Vanja Kojić and Gordana Petkovic** ●
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Introduction

In the Republic of Serbia, access to information regarding genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is generally regulated by the Law on Environmental Protection (known as “LEP”)¹ and the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance². Regarding the LEP, it regulates, among others, the public authority’s environmental information, including GMO-related information, such as information concerning environmental threats or protection. Regarding the Law on Access to Information of Public Importance, it promotes any stakeholder to seek clarification on any topic of importance to the public from the Competent National Authorities (CNAs). These laws are significant to implement the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. The laws also facilitate procedures for public participation regarding GMOs.

Initiatives related to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Aarhus Convention

Serbia is a party to the Cartagena Protocol based on the Law on the Ratification of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity³ and a party to the Aarhus Convention based on the Law on the Ratification of the Aarhus Convention⁴. However, Serbia has not yet ratified the GMO amendment to the Aarhus Convention, nor is it a signatory to the GMO amendment. As a priority step, the country is preparing to justify an accession to this amendment. The Expert Council on Biosafety has advised that in the new national GMO law, all provisions relating to the Aarhus Convention should directly be applied also to issues relating to GMOs. The provisions are, in particular, on public participation procedures regarding GMOs. The provision is valid regardless if Serbia has joined the GMO Amendment.

However, over the years, the country has had experience in setting in place several legislative frameworks relating to handling issues regarding GMOs in relation to access to information and public participation⁵.

For example, the Law on GMOs is another law that sets obligations to inform the public of issues related to GMOs and to organize public consultations in connection with applications of GMOs. The Law outlines policy and regulation on GMOs with regards to responsibilities of the Ministry relating to agriculture⁶. Further, the Expert Council for Biosafety, appointed by the Minister relating to agriculture, has to provide expert opinions to the Ministry relating to agriculture on applications for deliberate release into the environment of GMOs and GMO products. The Expert Council for Biosafety, consisting of 20 members chosen from, among others, scientists and experts on biosafety (e.g. biologists, geneticists, entomologists, ecologists, veterinarians, agronomists, nutritionists, toxicologists, allergists and other professions).

Further, the Food Safety Law, regulating genetically modified food (GM food) and genetically modified feed (GM feed), outlines procedures on, among other things, the recording of issued permits of GMOs⁷. The general provisions of the Food Safety Law define the Principle of Transparency that the duty of the CNA of the Cartagena Protocol is to inform the public of any potential or actual risk that a GM food or GM feed may pose to human or animal health. In accordance with the Principles of Transparency, public hearings shall be held, with the direct or indirect participation of any stakeholder, throughout the drafting and amendment of GM food regulations, except in emergencies when that would be impossible.

¹Official Gazette of Republic of Serbia No. 135/04, 36/09, 88/10, 14/16

²Official Gazette of RS No. 120/04, 54/07, 104/09, 36/10).

³Some of the annexes are in the Official Gazette of Republic of Serbia- International Treaties, No. 16/05

⁴Official Gazette of RS- International Treaties, No. 38/09

⁵Some of the legislations are the Law on GMOs (Official Gazette of RS”, No. 41/2009), the Food Safety Law (Official Gazette of RS”, No. 41/2009); and the Law on the Ratification of the Cartagena Protocol and the Convention on Biological Diversity, with its annexes (Official Gazette of Serbia and Montenegro - International Agreements, No. 16/2005).

⁶The Ministry relating to agriculture also keeps a register of GMOs and GMO products; however, the register is empty.

⁷Official Gazette of Republic of Serbia, No. 41/2009



PHOTO CREDIT: OBERHAUSEN/DAUTSHLAND/PIXABAY

Based on the legislative frameworks, there is some experience in implementing and handling issues relating to GMOs. For example, based on the previous GMO Law from 2001 to 2009, there were four approvals of applications for deliberate release of GMOs into the environment and one approval for GMO feed.

In addition, there were several public discussions, most notably in parliamentary hearings on GMOs and aired live on national TV in 2013. A two-day meeting was also held in the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts with the participation of leading Serbian experts related to biotechnology and biosafety in the same year. As a result, a publication of proceedings from that meeting contributed to the dissemination of a great deal of information regarding GMOs.

In Conclusion and Upcoming Initiatives

Over the years, Serbia has established a number of national instruments that support the promotion of public participation and access to information in order to implement the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol. Serbia is, therefore, ready to implement these instruments. The country is also a candidate for the accession to the European Union (EU) that requires further amendments to laws and new insights in implementing access to information and public participation procedures regarding GMOs).

Over the years, Serbia has established a number of national instruments that support the promotion of public participation and access to information in order to implement the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol.

To prepare for the EU accession, the National Convention on the European Union (NCEU) was established as a permanent body to facilitate cooperation between the National Assembly and civil society. The NCEU holds thematic debates among representatives of state administration, political parties, NGOs, experts, syndicates, the private sector and representatives of professional organizations. Further, the NCEU will facilitate a special platform between Serbia and the EU, to promote, among other things:

- Regular consultations of Serbian governmental institutions and bodies with stakeholders (e.g. civil society, local governments);
- The development of recommendations and opinions on Serbia's negotiating positions;
- Transparent and open dialogue throughout the negotiation process to accede to the EU; and
- Accurate public information about the accession process, negotiations and the requirements from stakeholders and the public. 🗣️

Experiences and Lessons Learned from Tunisia

by **Hatem Ben Belgacem, Raja Chalhouni and Sana**

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There are four main agricultural systems in Tunisia that includes cereal farming, fruit tree growing, stock raising and market gardening. A challenge is the expansion of intensive commercial agricultures and the use of new or more productive crop varieties. This has led to the marginalization of local crop varieties to the extent of extinction .

Historical Overview

In Tunisia, commercial agriculture has led to the enhanced introduction of living modified organisms (LMOs) into the local environment through the importation of crops such as maize and soybean. Aware of the impact of the fast expansion of modern biotechnology on the economy and the environment, Tunisia undertook several measures to promote public participation and access to information regarding biosafety.

Tunisia took part in several capacity-building initiatives. For example, Tunisia is among the 18 countries that participated in a pilot Project on the Development of the National Biosafety Framework (NBF) in 1999 supported by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Global Environment Facility (UNEP-GEF). By the end of this project, a National Biosafety Regulatory Framework was drafted including two relevant laws. Further, since Tunisia ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety on 22 January 2003, several institutions (e.g. faculties, research centers and laboratories) were created, in particular the National Gene Bank founded in 2007, to support the NBF. As many countries, Tunisia also benefited from the financial and technical support offered by UNEP-GEF on building national capacities for the development and implementation of the NBF and the Biosafety Clearing-House projects (BCH I and BCH II). These projects were highly advantageous to enhance familiarization of scientific-based information and to provide access to information and public participation opportunities to government institutions, civil society and other stakeholders¹.

¹In addition, as a result of the projects a national laboratories network for sampling, detection and identification of GMOs was developed through an agreement among the GMO Unit at the National Gene Bank, the Food Division at the Central Laboratory of Analysis and Assays, the Agri Food Technical Center and the Laboratory of Seeds Analysis of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Institutional measures and capacity building to promote public awareness and education

After Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety adopted the Programme of Work on public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of LMOs (2011-2015) and extended it until 2020 in response to the need to improve the implementation of Article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol, Tunisia undertook several institutional measures and initiatives to build capacities to raise public awareness and promote public education regarding LMOs/GMOs. Some of these measures also contribute to access to information and public participation and include:

- The national subcommittee on communication, education and public awareness was created in 2014 to, among others, facilitate the exchange of information on LMOs in the BCH; and operationalize the National BCH including the development and validation of information and outreach materials²;
- Regulations were developed and the draft biosafety law updated regarding public participation in the decision-making process on LMOs, according to the provisions of the Cartagena Protocol (namely Articles 20, 21 and 23);
- In 2016, a new NGO was established, the Tunisian Association for Biosafety and Environmental Education (ATB2E) to, among other things, raise awareness among various social groups regarding issues related in particular to biosafety; and
- Various outreach materials and other information were shared and disseminated through, among other things, Dropbox, USB keys, CD-ROMs³.

²There is also a national strategy and action plan on biosafety to comply with the provisions of the Cartagena Protocol in order to mainstream biosafety issues in a number of sectorial policies (e.g. agriculture, phyto-sanitary issues, seed production, research and health care). Other regulations have also been developed and a revision of the drafted law related to GMOs.

³Tunisia has also translated several outreach materials into several languages (e.g.



Tunisian Biosafety
Booklets

Lessons Learned

Combining modern communication tools to promote access to information and awareness (e.g., websites, e-learning modules, online discussions, e-governance tools, technical guides, media and file hosting services) can greatly facilitate public participation with regards to the decision-making process on LMOs/GMOs, where feasible. It also facilitates transparency and accountability. There is also a need for closer cooperation between various stakeholders (e.g. researchers, teachers, and NGOs) that are specialized in biosafety to, among others: build consensus on the choice of research methodologies on biosafety issues; identify objective information to be made available to the public; and provide access to information using different methods (e.g. caravans on biosafety to provide an educational package, eco-schools and campus programs⁴). However, the priority areas and sub-activities adopted at the eighth meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol (COP-MOP 8) need to be promoted in order to strengthen the implementation of the Programme of Work and to facilitate the implementation of Article 23.

increase national capacities to address the limited experience in biosafety issues. These complex measures will permit taking informed decisions with regards to ensuring long-term sustainable development. To address this, one possibility is to organize more joint Aarhus Convention/Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety round tables and invite many countries to contribute to the discussions with their experiences on these issues.

Finally, setting in place a national legal biosafety system to implement the Cartagena Protocol may be a challenge in many developing countries. To overcome this in Tunisia, a key recommendation is to build institutional capacities, including the establishment of an effective institutional mechanism to undertake measures necessary to implement the Cartagena Protocol. Such an institutional mechanism should be able to effectively promote public participation in the decision-making process regarding LMOs.

Joint Educational Initiatives

Tunisia has also had a number of joint educational initiatives. These include:

- Training courses on biotechnology and biosafety for different stakeholders on regulatory and institutional regimes, risk assessment and management and the BCH.
- A series of overseas training sessions and practical activities on detection and identification of GMOs for professionals from the national laboratories network for GMOs.
- Biosafety and biotechnology courses incorporated in academic courses at universities related to biotechnology and agricultural institutes.
- Many caravans, organized with the support of civil society, mainly the Tunisian Association for Biosafety and Environmental Education ATB2E: an awareness package targeting researchers, professors, students
- A workshop on risk assessment and risk management held in Tunis in 2012 attended by domestic regulators, academia, biosafety committee members and other stakeholders, who gained valuable international experience and learned about procedures and rules on evaluating environmental and health risks associated with LMOs.
- A number of national seminars and workshops, including the celebrations for the Biodiversity and Biosafety Days held annually during the International Day for Biodiversity in different regions of the country to promote different activities related to biosafety issues.
- Regional and international events such : A workshop for French-speaking African countries on Capacity-Building of BCH-NFPs, in Tunis in 2011; 18th Biosafety National Project Coordinators (NPCs) UNEP meeting for Africa on the Implementation of NBFs, 15-19 June, in 2015 in Sousse, Sfax and Tunis.
- First Annual Bio-risk Management Symposium for Biosafety Associations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region, 4-8 April, in 2017 in Tunis, organized by ATB2E and the International Federation of Biosafety Associations (IFBA).

The joint round tables were very useful to allow Parties to both instruments from different countries to share experiences and lessons learned.

Further, the two joint Aarhus Convention/Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety Round Tables on public awareness, access to information and public participation regarding LMOs/GMOs held in 2013 and in 2016 were very useful in allowing Parties to both instruments from different countries to exchange and sharing knowledge, experiences and lessons learned in particular in promoting similar aims regarding access to information and public participation. It also supported the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol in the context of LMOs/GMOs in synergy, and to explore opportunities to allocate funds for the participation of non-UNECE countries. Another useful guidance was to encourage countries outside the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region to ratify the Aarhus Convention and its GMO Amendment and/or to make use of the Lucca Guidelines (mainly the Annex II-V) and the Maastricht Recommendations as tools for developing legislation and procedures for effective access to information and public participation in the context of LMOs/GMOs.

New Initiatives

Based on the lessons learned, countries could take a number of initiatives to further promote public access to information and public participation regarding LMOs/GMOs. For example, special tools and guidance should be made available to

Arabic, French and English).

⁴Caravans also so called mobile vehicles

Useful Information



PHOTO CREDIT: JACK HOLLINGSWORTH/DIGITAL VISION/75288106/THINKSTOCK



E-learning Modules on the Biodiversity Platform E-Learning

- Access to biosafety Information
- Public Participation regarding LMOs
- Mainstreaming Biosafety into NBSAPs

<https://scbd.unssc.org/course/index.php?categoryid=9>



Online Discussion on Education regarding LMOs

Discussion groups on education regarding LMOs
http://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_art23/



Joint CBD/Aarhus Convention Measures

A summary of tools and resources for Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol on Biosafety on access to biosafety information and public participation
http://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_art23/pa_main.shtml



Join us at <https://www.facebook.com/UN.Biosafety>



Retirement from the Biosafety Unit

Mr. Charles Gbedemah, former head of the biosafety unit at the SCBD retired in 2017



Joint CBD/Aarhus Convention side events

A side event entitled "Building capacity for public participation regarding LMOs/GMOs to effectively implement the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the GMO Amendment" took place at the margins of the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties at the Aarhus Convention, in 11 September 2017, in Budva, Montenegro.

<https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/mop6/side-events/Budva-Sept-11-GMOs.pdf>



Poster Session at Fair at COP-MOP 8

UN Environment/CBD Poster Session at the CEPA Fair with posters from Guatemala, Moldova, Republic of Korea, Swaziland and the Aarhus Convention

<https://www.cbd.int/cepa/fair/2016/>



Preparations to Celebrate the entry into force of the Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress

A revamped website with resources and materials for the Supplementary Protocol is available at
<https://bch.cbd.int/protocol/supplementary/>



Webinar

Webinar: Asia-Pacific Science-Policy Dialogue on the Detection and Identification of LMOs, 26 January 2018
https://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_detection/apwebinar.shtml

Decisions Booklet for COP-MOP 8

The the COP-MOP 8 booklet is available on the Protocol website to download or print
http://bch.cbd.int/protocol/cpb_publications.shtml



Other relevant publications: CBD in a Nutshell for youth
https://www.cbd.int/youth/doc/cbd_in_a_nutshell.pdf
 and the new capacity-building newsletter, BioCAP
<https://www.cbd.int/doc/newsletters/default.shtml>

Statistics and Other Information

BIOSAFETY PROTOCOL (Programme of Work Priority Areas)	AARHUS CONVENTION (Lucca Guidelines on GMOs)
<p>Priority Area 1 - Advance legal and/or policy frameworks and mechanisms with regard to public awareness and participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt, harmonize and implement legal and/or policy frameworks and mechanisms related to Article 23 of the Protocol, in particular the NBFs and incorporating general access to information laws in to biosafety procedures (e.g. the Freedom of information laws); • Share and announce the availability of frameworks and mechanisms related to Article 23 in the Central Portal and national and regional Biosafety Clearing-House nodes. <p>Priority Area 3 - Advance tools, resources and processes to broaden training activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and make use of the Secretariat's e-learning modules on access to information, public participation and upcoming public education as well as upcoming training activities; • Make use of relevant tools, guidelines and other related resources in developing training activities and materials. 	<p>Article 7 - It is recommended that the public concerned should be informed, either by public notice or individually as appropriate, early in the decision-making procedure, and in an adequate, timely and effective manner of the aspects described in annex II.</p> <p>Annex II - RECOMMENDED CONTENTS OF THE PUBLIC NOTICE to the public concerned in the context of the decision-making procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed activity and the application on which a decision will be taken; • The type of decision which is being taken (e.g. a decision on whether to grant a permit for the import of a GMO, a deliberate release, etc.); • The public authority responsible for making the decision; • The envisaged process, including, as and when this information can be provided; • The commencement of the process; • The opportunities for the public to participate e.g. written comments, public hearing); • The time and venue of any planned public hearing; • The public Authority/official body from which relevant information can be obtained; • The public authority/official body to which comments or questions can be submitted; • An indication of what environmental information relevant to the proposed activity is available; • Any other information that the public authority considers appropriate.
<p>Priority Area 6 - Improve tools and procedures for access to information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a process to handle requests for information; • Set up a procedure to actively notify the public of information and means of public access to the Biosafety Clearing-House; • Make use of the summary of tools and checklist on access to information, as appropriate; • Regularly promoting up-to-date access to information of websites and traditional tools to a wider-audience; • Promote access to information and best practices/ awareness in particular to women and youth. <p>Priority Area 7 - Mobilize the public and ensure gender-equality for a wider target audience to participate in the decision-making process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use effective tools for public participation targeted in particular to marginalized groups and notify the public of these in a timely manner; • Use effective mechanisms and procedures for public participation; • Use local languages in public participation processes. 	<p>Articles 29 and 30 - It is recommended that the Parties should develop mechanisms to ensure that sufficient information on products consisting of GMOs or containing GMOs is made available to the public in a manner which enables consumers to make informed environmental choices about such products. One of such mechanism is the labelling of products consisting of or containing GMOs.</p> <p>Annex IV - POSSIBLE WAYS FOR THE PUBLIC AUTHORITIES TO MAKE INFORMATION ON GMOs AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing sufficient information to the public about the type and scope of information on activities with GMOs that they hold, the basic terms and conditions under which such information is made available and accessible, and the process by which it can be obtained. This can be done through Internet sites or regular publications; • Establishing and maintaining practical arrangements, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - publicly accessible lists, registers or files; - requiring officials to support the public in seeking access to information; and - the identification of points of contact; • Providing access to the information on activities with GMOs contained in publicly accessible lists, registers or files free of charge; and • The lists, registers or files with publicly accessible information on activities with GMOs may be available at national, regional and/or local governmental or public premises, as appropriate, and progressively on their Internet sites.

http://bch.cbd.int/protocol/cpb_art23_pow.shtml#areas

<https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=21475>

Statistics and Other Information

**The Aarhus Convention and
Biosafety Protocol common Parties**



	<p>47 Parties in common</p> <p>Albania Armenia Austria Azerbaijan Belarus Belgium Bosnia and Herzegovina Bulgaria Croatia Cyprus Czech Republic Denmark Estonia European Union Finland France Georgia Germany Greece</p>
<p>47 Parties in common</p> <p>Hungary Ireland Italy Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan Latvia Lithuania Luxembourg Malta Montenegro Netherlands Norway Poland Portugal Republic of Moldova</p>	
 <p>UNEP</p>  <p>Convention on Biological Diversity</p>	<p>47 Parties in common</p> <p>Romania Serbia Slovakia Slovenia Spain Sweden Switzerland Tajikistan The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Turkmenistan Ukraine United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland</p>

<https://www.unece.org/env/pp/nfp.html>

<http://bch.cbd.int/protocol/parties/>

Please note that the Czech Republic is also referred to as Czechia

Recent and Upcoming Biosafety Events

COP-MOP 8 -Major Accomplishments

The eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (COP-MOP 8) was held in Cancun, Mexico, from 4 to 17 December 2016. With regards to the third assessment and review of the effectiveness of the Cartagena Protocol and the mid-term evaluation of the Strategic Plan, COP-MOP 8 welcomed the contribution from the first meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI), the input of the Compliance Committee under the Cartagena Protocol and the contribution from Liaison Group on Capacity Building. The COP-MOP invited Parties to consider prioritizing a number of operational objectives of the Strategic Plan for Biosafety for its remaining period. Further, COP-MOP 8 extended the programme of work on PAEP until 2020 with priority areas (http://bch.cbd.int/protocol/cpb_art23_pow.shtml#areas)

Mainstreaming and integrated implementation of biosafety

With regards to mainstreaming biosafety into national policies and processes, the Secretariat made a presentation on “Biosafety and biosecurity: finding synergies at national and subnational levels” at a webinar organized through the Regions for Biodiversity Learning Platform (R4BLP) by the Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development. The webinar took place on 28 June 2017. The Secretariat also made a webinar for the NBSAPs Forum on mainstreaming of biosafety on 25 October 2016.

An Asian Subregional Workshop on Strengthening Capacities for the Integrated Implementation of the Protocol, the Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress and the Convention from 6 to 10 November 2017, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Participants analyzed relevant national policies, laws and institutional frameworks, identifying opportunities, and thereby develop a draft national mainstreaming strategy that set out steps to achieve integrated implementation of biosafety concerns in a variety of sectoral and cross-sectoral policies, laws and institutional frameworks.

Workshop on national border controls on LMOs for the Caribbean

Handling, Transport, Packaging and Identification

Two workshops on developing capacity for national border controls on LMOs were held (Pacific small island developing States) in Suva, Fiji from 27 to 29 March 2017 and (Small island developing States in the Caribbean) 17 - 19 October 2016 in St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago. The objectives of the workshop were to assist customs and border control officials in the implementation of the Cartagena Protocol's provisions with regard to handling, transport, packaging and identification of LMOs, as well as sampling and detection of LMOs in the context of illegal and unintentional transboundary movements; and to share experiences and assess national needs and gaps for the effective implementation of the relevant outcomes under the Strategic Plan for the Cartagena Protocol.

Compliance Committee

The Compliance Committee held its 14th meeting in Montreal from 16 to 18 May 2017. It decided that a standing item be included in the agenda for future meetings of the Committee to facilitate consideration of ongoing individual cases of non-compliance. The Committee also reviewed compliance on the basis of third national reports with a focus on priority areas identified by the meeting of the Parties and requested the Secretariat to seek information from Parties facing challenges with particular obligations, including: the introduction of legal, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the Protocol and their monitoring obligations, for consideration at its next meeting. In this context, the Committee reviewed the types of assistance it could offer Parties and updated the “Information note on the role of the Compliance Committee in assisting Parties”. The Committee also explored the possible reasons for the lower rate of reporting for the current reporting cycle. The Committee welcomed the extended availability of funds provided by the Global Environment Facility for the completion of third national reports, which may assist eligible Parties to submit their third national report. The Committee decided that the Chair would also send follow-up letters to those Parties whose third national report is still outstanding. The meeting was attended by 12 members of the Compliance Committee.

COP-MOP 8, Working Group I with Chair, Mette Gervin Damsgaard (Denmark); and SCBD staff members



The Biosafety Clearing-House

From 20 to 23 June 2017, the Pacific Regional Training Workshop for Biosafety Clearing House (BCH) National Focal Points was convened by UN Environment, in collaboration with the Secretariat, and brought together the National Focal Points to enhance the capacities of Pacific Island nations to effectively participate in the BCH as part of the BCH III project. By the end of the workshop, participants unanimously agreed to the “One PASIFIKA Biosafety Roadmap”, a navigation tool for island nations to effectively put in place biosafety measures beyond the BCH III project. This roadmap consists of four main components: enhancing capacity, establishing sustainable administrative systems, improving compliance with the Cartagena Protocol, and enhancing collaboration within the region. Further, UN Environment and the Secretariat held a BCH Training Workshop in Cancun, Mexico, 11 December 2016.

BCH Pacific Regional Training Workshop for Biosafety



Unintentional transboundary movement of emergency measures

The Asia-Pacific Workshop on the Detection and Identification of LMOs was convened in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 20 to 24 March 2017. The objectives of the workshop were to provide theoretical and hands-on training on: (i) Sampling, detection and identification of LMOs in the context of the Cartagena Protocol; (ii) Laboratory methodologies used for the analysis of samples; and (iii) Sharing experiences and assessing national needs and gaps for the effective implementation of the relevant outcomes under the Strategic Plan for the Cartagena Protocol. As part of the participants' conclusions and recommendations following the workshop, they agreed that a series of online activities by the group would facilitate the consolidation of the knowledge gained during the workshop and encourage the sharing of information between labs within the region. In following up with these requests the Secretariat organized online discussions.

Socio-economic considerations

The Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Socio-economic Considerations was held from 9 to 13 October 2017 in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The final report is available at <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/4bd1/c99f/64e787a7e3cdd5a49d667e2d/cp-sec-ahteg-2017-01-03-en.pdf>

AHTEG Meeting on Socio-economic Considerations



Asia-Pacific Workshop on the Detection and Identification of LMOs



Compliance Committee Meeting



Public Awareness, education and participation, including access to information

The Online Forum on Education regarding LMOs from 3 April to 5 May 2017 that aimed to facilitate an exchange of views and information on an upcoming course entitled, “Review of a module on public education regarding LMOs”. The expected outcomes of the discussions were to facilitate the implementation of programme element 2 of the Programme of Work and its priority areas 3 and 5 on advancing tools, resources and processes to broaden training activities and strengthen biosafety education at all levels. The discussions had a total of 227 participants and a total of 94 messages were posted. The moderators’ summary and recommendations will be available at http://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_art23/pe_forum.shtml

The second joint Aarhus Convention/CBD Round Table on Public Awareness, Access to Information and Public Participation regarding LMOs/GMOs in Geneva, Switzerland, 15 - 17 November 2016. Participants identified and discussed the priority areas/activities for the Programme of Work that allowed for the development of concrete national, regional and international activities. A Chair’s summary of the way forward recommended, an extension of the Programme of Work until 2020 and encourage the adoption of priority areas/activities, countries outside UNECE region to accede to the Aarhus Convention, the development of “a pocket guide” describing benefits, systemic challenges, priority areas and good practices in relation to promoting transparency and public participation in GMO/LMO matter. The report is available at <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42179>

Upcoming Meetings

African Regional Workshop on strengthening capacities for the integrated implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress and the Convention on Biological Diversity, 19 - 23 February 2018, Lilongwe, Malawi

Workshop on Detection and Identification of Living Modified Organisms for Francophone Africa, 5 - 9 March 2018, Tunis, Tunisia

Latin American and the Caribbean Regional Workshop on Strengthening Capacities for the Integrated Implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress and the Convention on Biological Diversity, 19 - 23 March 2018 Mexico City, Mexico

Fifteenth meeting of the Compliance Committee under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, 8 - 10 May 2018 Montreal, Canada

Twenty-second meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, 2 - 7 July 2018, in Montreal, Canada

Second meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation, 9 - 13 July 2018, in Montreal, Canada

Ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, 10 - 22 November 2018, in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt (Tentative)

Other Upcoming Events

-E-learning course on education regarding LMOs at <http://scbd.unssc.org/>

-Open-ended Online Expert Forum on Risk Assessment and Risk Management, 29 January -

-Online forum on public awareness regarding LMOs (TBA)

-Joint CBD/Aarhus Convention “Pocket Guide” (TBA)

-Celebration of the entry into force of the Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress, 5 March 2018

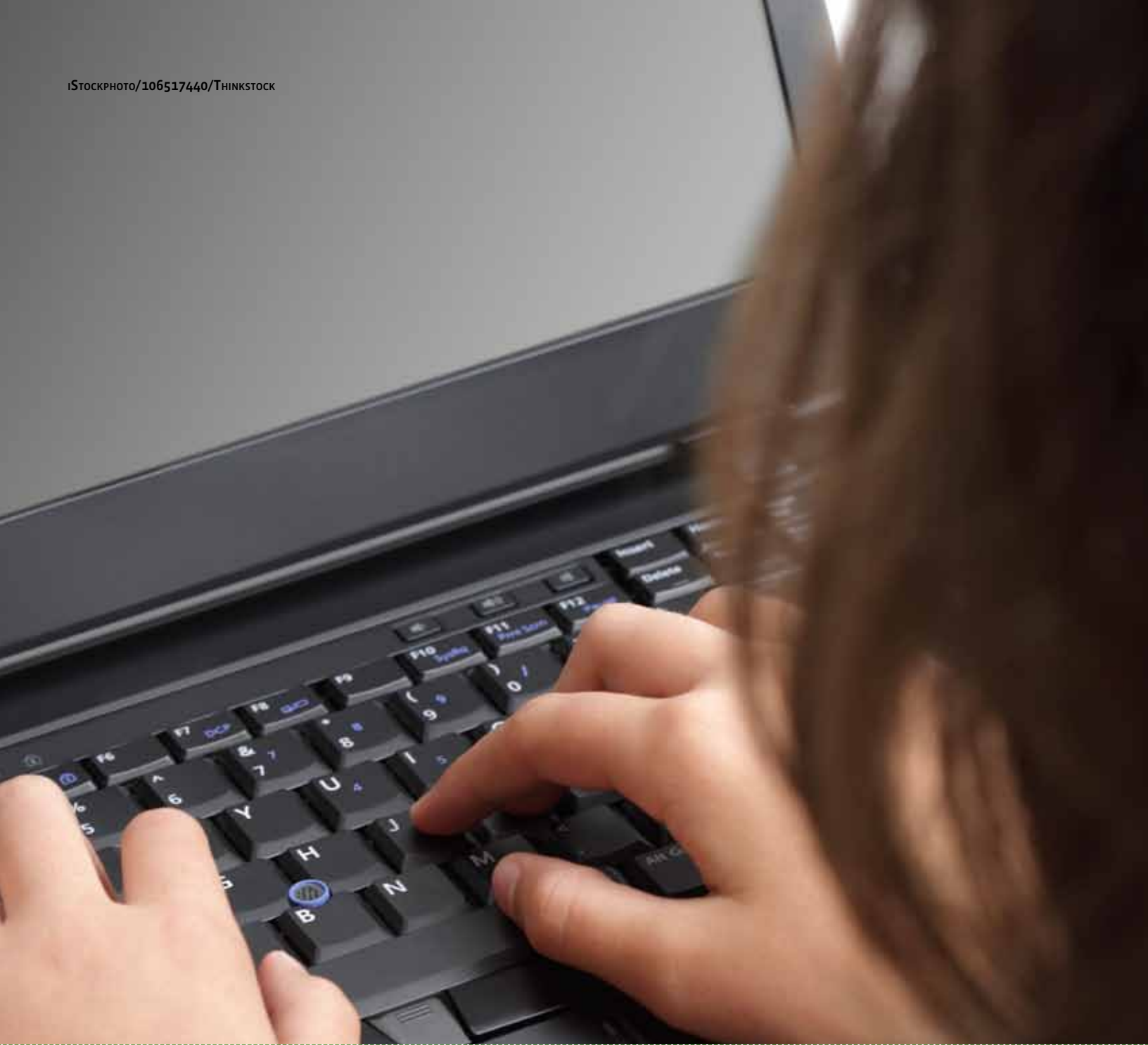
-Celebration of 15 years of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, 11 September 2018 (events TBA)

SCBD organized side event on Risk Assessment of LMOs



Joint CBD/Aarhus Convention Round Table





The **Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity** is an international agreement which aims to ensure the safe handling, transport and use of living modified organisms (LMOs) resulting from modern biotechnology that may have adverse effects on biological diversity, taking into account risks to human health.

The **Nagoya - Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety** is an international treaty which aims to contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity by providing international rules and procedures for liability and redress in the event of damage resulting from LMOs.