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**AU/EXP/ST/16(III)**

**OUTCOME OF THE AFRICAN REGIONAL WORKSHOP  
ON RISK ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT OF LIVING  
MODIFIED ORGANISMS**

**AFRICAN REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON  
CAPACITY BUILDING AND EXCHANGE  
OF EXPERIENCES ON RISK ASSESSMENT  
AND RISK MANAGEMENT OF  
LIVING MODIFIED ORGANISMS  
AUGUST 23-25, 2007  
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

**REPORT**

## Introduction

The African regional workshop on capacity-building and exchange of experiences on risk assessment and risk management of living modified organisms was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 23 to 25 August 2007. It was organized back-to-back with the African Union (AU) Experts Meeting on the Revised African Model Law on Safety in Biotechnology. The workshop was attended by 56 participants from 25 countries and 16 organizations that are involved in risk assessment and risk management of living modified organisms.

The following countries were represented: Burundi, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The following organizations were represented: Addis Ababa University, AfricaBio, African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), African Biodiversity Network, African Union Commission, Agence Africaine de Biotechnologie (AAB), Community of Sahel-Saharan States, COPAGEN, Eastern Africa Farmers Federation, Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FOEN), Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), Horomaya University, Institute for Sustainable Development, NEPAD Biosciences east and central Africa (Beca), New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

Eight resource persons from the following organizations facilitated the workshop: Association for Agricultural Research in East and Central Africa (ASARECA), Institute of Sahel (INSAH), Makerere University Kampala, Netherlands Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, Netherlands National Institute of Public Health and Environment, United Nations Environment Programme - Global Environment Facility (UNEP-GEF), University of Minnesota and University of Nairobi.

## Objective

The objectives of the workshop were to enable participants:

1. To learn about risk assessment and risk management in the context of the Biosafety Protocol and to review the general concepts, principles and methodologies;
2. To exchange practical experiences and lessons learned in conducting/reviewing risk assessments and implementing risk management measures in Africa;
3. To review existing guidance materials on risk assessment and risk management and consider the need for further guidance;
4. To review the format and key elements of risk assessment reports/dossiers and summaries for living modified organisms;
5. To identify tools and mechanisms for promoting cooperation and networking between experts and agencies involved in risk assessment and risk management at the regional level, including the exchange of information, expertise, training materials and risk assessment tools.

## Procedural Report

The workshop was officially opened by Dr. Raymonde Agossou, Acting Director, Department of Human Resources, Science and Technology at the African Union Commission. Mr. Charles Gbedemah, Head of the Biosafety Division at the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity also made opening remarks.

In her remarks, Dr. Agossou welcomed participants on behalf of the African Union Commission. She said the AU Commission was honoured to host the workshop and was pleased to have worked with the CBD Secretariat in organizing it. She informed participants about the decision taken in 2005 by the African Union Executive Council, which stresses the need for Member States of the African Union to build necessary human and institutional capacities to address biosafety issues within the framework of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. She also highlighted the African Strategy on Biosafety, which was adopted along with the African High Level Panel Report on Modern Biotechnology at the Extraordinary Session of the African Ministers' Conference on Science and Technology in November 2006. She noted that the pillars of the Strategy include capacity building, preparedness for international negotiations and international cooperation.

Dr. Agossou also made reference to the draft revised African Model Law on Safety in Biotechnology, which had been discussed by the experts just prior to this workshop. She expressed the hope that the revised model law, once adopted, would help to facilitate the regulation of modern biotechnology by the AU Member States. Dr. Agossou concluded her remarks by expressing gratitude for the collaboration between the AUC and the CBD Secretariat in organizing the workshop and wished participants fruitful deliberations.

In his statement, Mr. Gbedemah noted that a lack of capacity, particularly with respect to limited expertise in the field of risk assessment and risk management, continues to be a major challenge facing many developing countries and countries with economies in transition in the implementation of the Protocol. He recalled decision BS-III/11 taken by the COP-MOP at its third meeting in Curitiba, Brazil in March 2006 which *inter alia* urged Parties and other government to undertake a number of activities to foster capacity-building in risk assessment and risk management. The COP-MOP also noted a potential need for further guidance focussed on particular types of living modified organisms, for example on risk assessment for emerging applications of living modified organisms. In this regard, the COP-MOP agreed to consider at its next meeting the need for developing further specific guidance on specific aspects of risk assessment and risk management and consider the appropriate modalities for developing such guidance. Mr. Gbedemah outlined the objectives of the workshop and urged participants to discuss freely and make concrete recommendations to enhance the capacity for undertaking and/or reviewing risk assessment in the region and to facilitate the discussions at the next meeting of the COP-MOP. He thanked the Government of the Netherlands for providing financial support for the workshop and the African Union Commission for co-organizing and hosting the workshop. In particular he recognized the contribution made by Mr. Bather Kone and Ms. Mahlet Teshome in handling the logistical preparations for the workshop. Finally, Mr. Gbedemah expressed the Secretariat's gratitude to the resource persons who offered to facilitate the workshop.

Participants elected Mr. Matthew Dore (Nigeria) to serve as Chairperson of the workshop and Mr. Joseph Francois (Seychelles) as Rapporteur.

The workshop adopted its agenda on the basis of the provisional agenda proposed by the Executive Secretary in document UNEP/CBD/BS/RW-RA&RM/Afr./1/1. The programme of the workshop contained in document UNEP/CBD/BS/RW-RA&RM/Afr./1/1/Add.1 (attached as Annex I to this report), was also adopted.

The following substantive items were addressed:

1. Introduction to risk assessment and risk management of living modified organisms;
2. National and regional experiences and lessons learned in the implementation of the risk assessment and risk management provisions of the Protocol;
3. Guidance materials for risk assessment and risk management;
4. Key considerations in the preparation and/or review of risk assessments; and
5. Regional cooperation and sharing of information and expertise on risk assessment and risk management.

### **Key recommendations pertaining to the African Union and the Commission**

Following the brainstorming sessions in the different working groups, which were established in the course of the workshop and the general discussions during the plenary sessions, participants adopted the following recommendations:

Parties and other governments in Africa should:

Finalise and adopt their biosafety regulatory frameworks as soon as possible, if they have not done so. This is especially critical for those countries that have already received or are considering applications for import or release of living modified organisms and reviewing risk assessments. The African Model Law on Safety in Biotechnology should be used as much as possible as a guidance material

Require members selected to serve on national biosafety committees and technical expert panels or advisory committees to declare their affiliations and interests in general and in respect to specific applications and to voluntarily disqualify themselves from considering applications where there is a potential or perceived conflict of interest.

The African Union Commission should:

(i) Set up a permanent and functional unit on biosafety within its Secretariat to provide technical and other support to member states, coordinate region-wide biosafety initiatives and facilitate collaboration and exchange of information between initiatives of member states.

(ii) Play leadership role in mobilizing political and financial support for biosafety programmes and activities in Africa.

(iii) Disseminate to all relevant institutions dealing with biosafety issues in the region the African Strategy on Biosafety which was adopted by the eighth African Union Summit in January 2007, which provides a road map to address biosafety, needs of the region and facilitate its timely implementation.

(iv) Facilitate the development of sub-regional biosafety strategies, in collaboration with the regional economic communities.

- (v) Set a regional technical advisory panel on biosafety to, upon request, provide independent expert advice to member states on different biosafety issues, including reviewing applications and risk assessment reports and providing scientific opinion and advice.
- (vi) Work out a mechanism and facilitate the establishment a regional network of certified laboratories and green houses in Africa that deal with living modified organisms, to assist countries in their biosafety research and risk assessment activities.
- (vii) Take lead in the identification of, and establishment of a database, of existing biosafety and biotechnology centres of excellence in the African Region.

### **Human resources capacity development**

Parties and other governments in the region should:

- (viii) Invest in increasing the pool of trained experts and trainers in various fields that are relevant for risk assessment and risk management in order to provide a reservoir of human resources at the national and regional levels.
- (ix) Maximise the use of existing human resources in the region, *inter alia*, through staff exchanges and use of expertise available at various regional and sub-regional centres of excellence.
- (x) Identify and mobilize local experts in different national institutions who are trained in disciplines relevant for risk assessment and risk management of living of modified organisms and establish roster of experts at the national and/or sub-regional and regional levels.
- (xi) Compile and submit to the African Union Commission and to the respective Regional Economic Communities (RECs), by December 2007, a list of experts with scientific competence in risk assessment and other related disciplines, including those who were identified during the development of the national biosafety frameworks, so that countries in the sub-regions can consult or use them in conducting risk assessment.
- (xii) Organise risk assessment and risk management training workshops for policymakers, regulators, risk management officials and members of the National Biosafety Committees to enable them gain some understanding of the basic principles, steps and requirements so that they know what information to ask for and how to evaluate the information submitted.

The African Union Commission should:

- (xiii) Follow-up with the National Focal Points for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the regional economic communities to ensure that the above recommendations and others mentioned in this report are implemented.
- (xiv) Organise more training workshops for the member states on various aspects of risk assessment and risk management, in collaboration with the CBD Secretariat and other relevant agencies.
- (xv) Identify and disseminate to member states existing risk assessment and risk management training/resource materials, including guidance documents.
- (xvi) Encourage and support member states and relevant regional and sub-regional organizations to develop fellowship and mentorship programmes in the field of biosafety.

(xvii) Work with regional economic communities to identify which Universities could be utilised to develop academic programmes in biosafety.

Relevant organisations working at regional, sub-regional and national levels, including UN agencies (such as UNEP-GEF, UNDP and UNECA), NEPAD and the private sector should:

(xviii) Proactively reach to countries and assist them in developing and implementing biosafety capacity-building initiatives.

(xix) Develop or provide financial and technical support to countries and sub regions to develop short-term training activities for different target groups (e.g. trainers, regulators, inspectors, etc) on different aspects of risk assessment and risk management.

(xx) Assist countries to develop harmonized frameworks for risk assessment and risk management.

### **Institutional, technical and infrastructure capacities for risk assessment**

Parties and other governments should:

(xxi) Increase funding for risk assessment research on living modified organisms.

(xxii) Galvanize political commitment for increased funding to public institutions.

(xxiii) Develop functional biosafety systems and upgrade biosafety research facilities.

(xxiv) In the short-term, maximise the use of existing infrastructure, including those available at regional and sub-regional centres of excellence.

(xxv) In the medium to long-term, invest resources in developing their own infrastructure for risk assessment and risk management, including building or refurbishing and re-equipping laboratories, greenhouses and facilities for contained field trials, in the long-run.

(xxvi) Identify and submit to the African Union Commission and the respective regional economic communities by December 2008 a list of facilities (e.g. GM detection laboratories) and centres of excellence within their jurisdiction which can be used by other countries.

The African Union Commission should:

(xxvii) Take a leadership in mobilizing political and financial support for biosafety programmes and activities in Africa.

(xxviii) Identify centres of excellence in the different sub regions which can assist member states to develop their capacity in risk assessment and risk management and biosafety in general.

(xxix) Identify and develop a directory of institutions or offices which member states can contact directly to request and access risk assessment information and expert advice when required.

(xxx) Compile a list of all ongoing and planned initiatives in biosafety and modern biotechnology and make it available to all member states.

The regional economic communities should:

(xxxi) Set up of biosafety offices with dedicated staff to develop and coordinate biosafety activities in the respective sub-regions.

### **Data and information to support risk assessments**

Parties and other governments should:

- i. Exchange available data and information relevant for risk assessment and risk management through the BCH, national websites and databases and other mechanisms such as regional networks and centres of excellence.
- ii. Strengthen biosafety research capacity in the region in order to facilitate in gathering of baseline data to support risk assessments and post-release monitoring.
- iii. Promote research exchanges, scholarship/fellowship programmes and other programmes to support biosafety scientific research.
- iv. Submit risk assessment summaries to the database established in Biosafety Clearing-House and share the full risk assessments through the Biosafety Information Resource Centre in the BCH. Also submit copies to the African Union Commission and the regional economic communities.

The African Union Commission should:

- i. Collect information about existing biosafety studies and research information and make it available on its web site to make it easier for governments to access it.
- ii. Develop initiatives to strengthen biosafety research capacity in Africa.
- iii. Establish a database for reports of risk assessments carried out in Africa and make it accessible through the Biosafety Clearing-House.
- iv. Collect and disseminate to member states reports of risk assessments carried out within Africa.

### **Risk assessment and risk management guidance materials**

In order to develop risk assessment guidance relevant to the Africa region, it was recommended that governments should:

- i. Compile biology documents (e.g. botanic files) for crops of common ecological regions
- ii. Fund research that addresses questions specific relevant for Africa's situation.
- iii. Use graduate and post graduate students, research fellows and scientists to fill risk assessment gaps.

- iv. Share guidance materials and information generated within the region, even in raw form.
- v. Develop guidance on secondary issues such as SOP, manuals, management of trials etc.

The African Union Commission should:

- i. Collect and review existing guidance materials on risk assessment information that are of relevance to Africa.
- ii. Initiate a project to gather and compile regional databases on risk assessment.
- iii. Create database for above-mentioned information and make accessible through the BCH
- iv. Establish a 'competitive' research grants scheme for generating Africa-specific data on biosafety.

The CBD Secretariat should.

- i. Create a facility through the BCH to handle queries on risk assessment.

COP-MOP 4 is invited to consider the need for further guidance and capacity building to address the following aspects in assessment and risk management:

- i. Dynamics of pollination biology.
- ii. Soil biology systems.
- iii. Isolation distances - linked to pollen movement.
- iv. Evolution of resistance.
- v. Understanding of Refugia niches.
- vi. Information on characteristics of the receiving environments.
- vii. Long term monitoring of environmental releases..

COP-MOP 4 is also invited to consider the following needs:

- i. Guidance on how to access information on characteristics of the environment (e.g. work on gene-flow)
- ii. Development of the countries' capacities to review and interpret the risk assessment data
- iii. Facilitation of access to information that relates to specific ecosystems.
- iv. Provision of assistance to build the capacities of countries to be able to review and interpret information contained in guidance tools and materials
- v. Encouragement and facilitation of countries to share information on specific species within similar ecological zones.

- vi. Establishment of facilities or support services through the BCH to assist countries to deal with risk assessment issues.
- vii. Translation of existing guidance materials in French, and Arabic languages (Official UN Languages used in Africa).

#### **Common format for risk assessment summaries submitted to the BCH**

- i. COP-MOP 4 is invited to consider and adopt the expanded BCH common format for risk assessment summaries, which is contained Annex II to this report.

#### **Regional and technical cooperation**

Parties and other governments should:

- i. Foster collaboration and exchange of expertise among competent authorities and centres of excellence in the region.
- ii. Establish an inter-ministerial task force to foster coordination and collaboration and promote a consolidated approach on biosafety in region.

The African Union Commission should:

- i. Request the ministers of environment of the member states to hold regular dialogue session with regard to pursuing a common strategy on biosafety and to ensure implementation of existing regional strategies and policies in a harmonised manner.
- ii. Finalise the African common position on genetically modified organisms and seek its full endorsement by the AU assembly.
- iii. Facilitate efforts to enhance synergies between the ongoing processes for science and technology in the African Union under the AMCOST and AMCEN.

Governments, the African Union Commission and the regional economic communities should:

- i. Engage and actively involve civil society organizations, farmers and the public in relevant biosafety processes and activities (including decision making processes).
- ii. Develop and implement more biosafety public awareness and information dissemination programmes in the region.
- iii. Parties and other governments should establish efficient traceability systems as part of their risk management measures in order to mitigate case undesirable occurrences.
- iv. In order to facilitate the fullest participation of the non-English speakers, all the materials used in the workshops available in the other official languages of the African Union.

