

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND TRANSPARENCY IN BIOSAFETY

Joint Aarhus Convention/Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety
Second global round table on public awareness, access to information and public participation regarding
living modified organisms (LMOs)/genetically modified organisms (GMOs)
Geneva, Switzerland, 15-17 November 2016

THE WAY FORWARD – CHAIR’S SUMMARY¹

1. In a closing statement, the Chair summarized the key outcomes of the round table, including a set of proposals based on the discussions held during the different sessions. The Chair observed that the round table called for concrete actions at the national level to:

- Strengthen coordination and cooperation between national focal points of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (through e.g. make their contact information available on both Aarhus Convention and Convention on Biological Diversity websites; and at relevant national websites);
- Considering the complexity of the subject matter and the specific expertise required, encourage Parties to the Aarhus Convention to nominate an additional focal point dealing specifically with GMO issues;
- Strengthen cooperation between public authorities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on GMO/LMO issues and promote effective inter-ministerial/interdepartmental mechanisms to handle GMO/LMO issues that are open to NGOs, academia and other stakeholders (e.g. advisory bodies, national gene banks, associations);
- Make use of the Aarhus Centres, if available, or other relevant organisations, to help to strengthen capacities of authorities to promote effectively access to information and public participation in GMO/LMO issues thereby assisting Parties to ratify the GMO amendment and implement the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol in the context of GMOs/LMOs;
- Ratify and implement the GMO Amendment to the Aarhus Convention;
- Promote awareness and education to decision-makers in order to expedite adoption and implementation of domestic legislation related or applicable to LMOs/GMOs;
- Establish an effective system of access to information with regard to LMOs/GMOs that would allow all interested stakeholders to receive information in a timely and effective manner;
- Establish a system enabling effective and inclusive public participation with regard to LMOs/GMOs;
- Provide access to information with regards to customs officials, laboratories and other relevant stakeholders on existing legal provisions on handling, transport, packaging and identification of GMOs/LMOs, including for an efficient border control system;
- Address the issue of non-compliance in some countries, when laws regarding GMOs/LMOs are in place, which may provide for a ban, while in practice

¹ This Chair’s summary was not formally edited.

GMOs/LMOs are illegally grown and available on the market with no reliable information provided to the public;

- Encourage an extension and implementation of the Programme of Work on public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety until 2020 and encourage the adoption of priority areas/activities to implement its Article 23, and enhance cooperation with the Aarhus Convention in the context of GMOs/LMOs;
- Encourage countries outside UNECE region to accede to the Aarhus Convention and its GMO Amendment and/or to make use of the Lucca Guidelines² and the Maastricht Recommendations³ as tools for developing legislation and procedures for effective access to information and public participation in the context of LMOs/GMOs;
- Make use of a guidance material, such as the checklist of key measures required for ratifying and implementing the two instruments and the summary of tools and resources to support implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol in the context of LMOs/GMOs⁴, developed jointly under the auspices of the two treaties;
- Participate in training activities to ensure that the GMO Amendment and Article 23 are essential when mainstreaming issues related to access to information and public participation with regard to LMOs/GMOs into broader processes, programmes and agendas relating to biodiversity, environment and sustainable development;
- Actively exchange information through the Biosafety Clearing-House⁵ and the Aarhus Clearing-House⁶ and engage in regional cooperation in facilitating clearing-houses, in particular sharing case-studies on best practices and lessons learned in promoting access to information and public participation;
- Make use of international events, such as International Day for Biodiversity (IDB) on 22 May or organise a biosafety week to raise awareness and provide information on LMOs/GMOs to the general public;
- Communicate and promote benefits of access to information and effective public participation on LMOs/GMOs issues;
- Take into account socio-economic considerations in promoting public awareness and education campaigns on biosafety to ensure that information reaches marginalized groups (e.g. women, local communities, ethnic minorities and different linguistic groups).

2. At the multilateral level, the secretariats and subsidiary bodies of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety should, as appropriate, continue

² Available at <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/gmos.html>.

³ Available at <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=41803&L=0>.

⁴ Available at <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/gmos.html>.

⁵ <https://bch.cbd.int>.

⁶ <https://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org>.

assisting countries in ratifying and implementing the two instruments in the context of LMOs/GMOs through:

- Encouraging bilateral and regional cooperation and partnerships with relevant organizations working in countries as to promote ratification of the GMO Amendment, and the implementation of Article 23 and the Aarhus Convention in the context of GMOs/LMOs;
- Promoting regional (e.g. the Asian BCH Family, the European network of GMO detection laboratories (ENGL)) and international networks to share benefits and good practices;
- Inviting the Global Environment Facility and other financial mechanisms to provide eligible Parties with dedicated financial resources to facilitate effective implementation of the Protocol's Programme of Work and the Aarhus Convention in the context of GMOs/LMOs;
- Providing training materials to prepare countries to ensure biosafety is important when mainstreaming the Aarhus Convention and Article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety into biodiversity, environmental and sustainable development policies and programmes;
- Keeping up with recent developments in relation to synthetic biology and new breeding techniques that may have an impact on defining GMOs/LMOs;
- Developing "a pocket guide" describing benefits, systemic challenges, priority areas and good practices in relation to promoting transparency and public participation in GMO/LMO matter;
- Organising a similar round table in the next inter-sessional period of the two treaties as to allow Parties to both instruments from different regions to exchange experiences thereby supporting implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol in the context of LMOs/GMOs in synergy, and explore opportunity to allocate funds also for participation of non-UNECE countries.

3. The proposed concrete actions and the key outcomes of the round table will be reported to the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (Budva, Montenegro, 11 - 14 September 2017) and to the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (4 - 17 December 2016, Cancun, Mexico).
