



TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AARHUS CONVENTION AND THE CARTAGENA PROTOCOL ON BIOSAFETY IN THE CONTEXT OF LMOs/GMOs¹

Introduction

The present note describes different tools and resources for the provision of technical assistance to support implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) relating to public awareness and participation and the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters in the context of living modified organisms (LMOs)/genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The document offers a useful source of information for Governments and different stakeholders.

The document was developed pursuant to the outcomes of the joint Aarhus Convention/Convention on Biological Diversity round table on access to information, public participation and access to justice regarding LMOs/ GMOs held in Geneva on 16 and 17 October 2013.

I. Multilateral processes

Multilateral processes provide useful modes for technical assistance and enable countries to learn directly from each other, to network with LMOs/GMOs experts in other countries and to establish contacts for information exchange and capacity-building activities.

The Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol has undertaken a number of activities to facilitate public awareness, education, and public participation with respect to LMOs/GMOs at multilateral level. These include the promotion of synergies in relevant decisions by their respective governing bodies; the organization of joint workshops, online discussion groups, roundtables; and the development of a survey template. These options for multilateral processes are set out below.

A. Meetings of governing bodies

Meetings of governing bodies, including the sessions of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, provide useful multilateral platforms not only for deliberations on policy matters,

¹ This document was not formally edited.

but also for technical assistance. They address a number of practical matters, such as overseeing the implementation of the work programmes; exchange of information on technical issues; exchange of examples of good practices; and consideration of guidance documents. Coordinated decisions by governing bodies can facilitate an enhanced implementation of the provisions of these international agreements by their Parties.

B. Workshops and roundtables

Joint workshops and roundtables can help to identify challenges in the implementation of the two agreements and facilitate the exchange of experiences among Parties and different stakeholders. They also enhance the skills of participants in different areas. Furthermore, these practical events help to clarify provisions of the international agreements and national procedures. They can also facilitate specific guidance on establishing effective national procedures, systems and/or mechanisms to implement agreements. In addition, they can also facilitate further concrete decisions among Parties to implement international agreements. In keeping with the above, the secretariats of the Aarhus Convention and the Convention on Biodiversity have undertaken a number of joint activities to address access to information and public participation with respect to LMOs/GMOs. These include the roundtable on access to information, public participation and access to justice regarding LMOs/GMOs (Geneva, 16-17 October 2013); the International workshop on public awareness, access to information and public participation regarding LMOs/GMOs (Nagoya, 8-9 October 2010); and the International workshop on access to information, public participation and access to justice regarding GMOs (Cologne, 19-20 May 2008). The outcomes of these events provide detailed overview of challenges identified by different countries and offer recommendations through good practices shared by participants.²

C. Online discussion groups

The secretariats have co-organized two online thematic discussion groups through the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH). In 2012, the discussion group focused on access to biosafety information regarding LMOs/GMOs, notably on: (a) the meaning, scope and importance of public access to biosafety information; and (b) facilitating public access to biosafety information. The second online discussion, organised in 2014, addressed different techniques for engaging the public³. The outcomes of the discussion groups are being used as resource materials during workshops and for training modules to assist countries in implementing the Aarhus Convention, its Almaty amendment on public participation in decisions on deliberate release into the environment and placing on the market of genetically modified organisms⁴ and the Cartagena Protocol's programme of work on public awareness, education and participation concerning LMOs.⁵

D. Surveys

Surveys in relation to awareness regarding LMOs/GMOs are a useful tool to ascertain the level of public awareness and evaluate public awareness of the issues regarding LMOs/GMO-

² The outcomes of the joint workshops and roundtables are available at: <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/gmos.html>

³ The online discussion groups are available at: http://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_art23/pa_main.shtml

⁴ Decision II/1 on Genetically Modified Organisms (ECE/MP.PP/2005/2/Add.2) is available at: <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/mop2/mop2.doc.html#/>

⁵ The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety's programme of work is available at: http://bch.cbd.int/protocol/cpb_art23_pow.shtml

related developments and the future needs. The results of such surveys can provide bodies under the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol, as well as national focal points and different stakeholders with additional insights into technical assistance needs and required resources. To undertake these activities the CBD Secretariat has developed a template of the survey form that could be adapted, expanded and used by Parties⁶. Parties are encouraged to share the analysis of their surveys through the Biosafety Information Resource Centre (BIRC) of the BCH⁷.

II. Bilateral assistance

Bilateral cooperation facilitates learning and assistance that may not otherwise be possible, for example, due to a lack of funds. Such assistance enables countries with advanced experience in implementing the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in the context of LMOs/GMOs to share their knowledge and expertise. Options for bilateral cooperation may include the following:

- (a) Organizing trainings, training-of-trainers workshops and study tours in order to strengthen specific technical expertise;
- (b) Sharing of information (e.g. good practices and lessons learned) and direct cooperation between countries' institutions, including bilateral exchange and assistance via electronic tools (e.g. video conferencing, e-meetings, e-learning online networks and multimedia-assisted tools); and
- (c) Developing training and guidance materials to help Parties and stakeholders to improve implementation of the agreements.

III. Advisory support upon request

Advisory support to Parties upon request can facilitate sharing of expertise in implementing international agreements. The two secretariats could facilitate provision of such advisory support

IV. Guidance and other support materials

Guidance material can be used for developing and implementing national plans, programmes and different activities thereby facilitating implementation of the Aarhus Convention, its Almaty Amendment and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. A number of useful materials to assist Parties, in particular, the Lucca Guidelines⁸ and the Checklist of Key Measures for the Ratification and Implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in the context of LMOs/GMOs⁹, were developed under the auspices of the two treaties. The checklist can serve as a guidance document to facilitate the ratification and implementation of these agreements.

In addition, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biodiversity has developed a template for a communication plan to facilitate the implementation of the Protocol's programme of work¹⁰. A communication plan can raise the profile of the agreement and guide the country to set in

⁶ The survey is available at: http://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_art23/pa_survey.shtml

⁷ <http://bch.cbd.int/database/record.shtml?documentid=103914>

⁸ The Lucca Guidelines (MP.PP/2003/3-KIEV.CONF/2003/INF/7) are available at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=21475>

⁹ The checklist, which also includes the list of useful material, is available at: http://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_art23/pa_main.shtml and <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/gmos.html>

¹⁰ The communication plan is available at: http://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_art23/pa_main.shtml

place a system to promote public awareness, education and participation regarding LMOs/GMOs. It recommends and prioritizes specific activities to be taken to raise awareness, promote education and build partnerships.

V. Electronic tools

Use of electronic tools managed by the secretariats should be encouraged. These tools provide support and facilitate learning on numerous aspects regarding implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in the context of LMOs/GMOs. For example, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biodiversity is in the process of developing e-learning modules/courses, including on access to biosafety information, public participation and public education.¹¹

A. The Biosafety Clearing-House

The BCH is a mechanism to facilitate the exchange of information on LMOs and assist the Parties to better comply with their obligations under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. Global access to a variety of scientific, technical, environmental, legal and capacity building information is provided in all 6 UN languages (<http://bch.cbd.int/>).

B. The Aarhus Convention's Clearing-House

The Aarhus Clearinghouse mechanism is dedicated to promoting the exchange of information and good practice in implementation of the Aarhus Convention and Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. In addition, the Aarhus Clearinghouse provides news and information on laws and practices relevant to the public's rights, including with respect to LMOs/GMOs (<http://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/>).

C. ECE Public Participation website

The ECE Public Participation website contains information about the Aarhus Convention, its Almaty Amendment, including their texts; the status of ratification; the Convention's bodies; the meetings and their documents; capacity-building events; guidance material and other publications (<http://www.unece.org/env/pp/welcome.html>).

¹¹ Links to the e-learning modules will be made available in 2016 on the Protocol webpage at <http://bch.cbd.int/protocol/>