

**CARTAGENA PROTOCOL ON BIOSAFETY:
Sharing of Best Practices on National Experiences with Public Awareness, Education
and Participation Efforts**

The Global Industry Coalition supports a work programme on public awareness, education and participation that focuses on international information exchange and sharing of best practices on public information, education and participation efforts that can assist Parties to comply with their obligations under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (Protocol) in accordance with their own national laws.

A. Implementation of Article 23 on Public Awareness, Education and Participation

- Given the importance of transparency to public acceptance of governmental decisions on living modified organisms (LMOs), work under the Protocol to identify ways in which Parties may assist one another or cooperate to promote and facilitate public awareness, education and participation concerning LMOs is an important undertaking. The Global Industry Coalition (GIC)¹ believes that Parties to the Protocol should focus work in this area on sharing best practices and exploring options for further cooperation.
- To this end, the GIC has developed 11 case studies from our global partners related to public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of LMOs, as well as information on ongoing initiatives on public awareness, education and participation, including major accomplishments, success stories, best practices and lessons learned. This material has been made available to the Secretariat and will be shared with Parties and non-Parties through the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH). It is also available at http://www.croplife.org/public/public_participation_case_studies.
- Article 23.2 of the Protocol addresses the issue of public consultation in government decision-making regarding LMOs. The GIC supports such consultation with the public on issues of relevance to science-based decision-making, but solely in connection with decisions on applications for the deliberate and unrestricted release of LMOs into the environment where public interest is arguably the strongest.² However, the GIC also notes that the procedures for such consultations must:
 - be transparent and proportionate to the risks involved;
 - respect confidential information in accordance with Article 21 of the Protocol;
 - not hinder research and development of new agricultural biotechnology products;
 - be supported by regulations; and
 - not be used to prevent entities from carrying out legally-authorized activities.
- The GIC strongly recommends that public participation opportunities must remain the concern and responsibility of national governments. As the Protocol recognizes, consultation with the public as part of decision-making is necessarily unique to each country's legal system,

¹ The Global Industry Coalition (GIC) for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety receives input and direction from trade associations representing thousands of companies from all over the world. Participants include associations representing and companies engaged in a variety of industrial sectors such as plant science, seeds, agricultural biotechnology, food production, animal agriculture, human and animal health care, and the environment.

² The GIC does not support public consultation in decision-making related to applications for contained use, field trials, or other types of applications other than those leading to full-scale and unrestricted environmental release.

regulations and traditions. Given this reality, any efforts to establish international requirements under the Protocol, or to impose regionally applicable guidelines, should not be pursued.

- Any public participation that is permitted in a country with respect to decision-making on LMOs should not differ in any way from participation permitted on other matters that may impact the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.
- Many countries do not yet have the regulatory frameworks necessary to support public participation systems for LMOs. Protocol implementation work should focus first and foremost on the development of the capacity of all Parties to comply with their existing obligations under the Protocol.

B. Elements of a Draft Decision on Public Awareness, Education and Participation

The GIC believes that the BCH should serve as the primary means of sharing information and case studies of national approaches to public awareness, education and participation systems with respect to environmental matters. Sharing and communicating these examples will provide invaluable assistance to governments as they consider how to incorporate public awareness, education and participation in their national biosafety systems.

The GIC also believes that Parties may benefit from guidance to assist them in developing systems for the protection of confidential information in connection with public awareness, education and participation programs.

Accordingly, the GIC supports the goals outlined in the work programme for consideration by the Parties at the fifth meeting of the Parties to the Protocol and requests Parties to adopt a decision that emphasizes the following elements:

- Review of the information on public awareness, education and participation currently available on the BCH and assess its level of accessibility.
- Information sharing on existing approaches to public awareness, education and participation in decision-making concerning environmental matters.
- Exchange of information on practical means for handling regulatory submissions to ensure respect for confidential information in connection with public awareness, education and participation.
- Creation of an informal advisory committee on public awareness, education and participation to provide advice and guidance on the implementation of the work programme *that includes qualified experts in this area from relevant observers, including the private sector.*
- Involvement of the public in decision-making on LMOs *only as related to decisions on applications on the deliberate and unrestricted release of LMOs into the environment.*