

## **Media Workshop on Communicating Science and Biosafety**

May 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Bangalore

### **A Brief Overview**

Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), New Delhi, a premier institution in mass communication education, training and research in collaboration with Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MOEFCC), Govt of India, Global Environment Facility (GEF) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is conducting a series of media workshops on 'Communicating Science and Biosafety' across the country. The workshops are a part of a project, 'Capacity Building Project on Biosafety (Phase II)' undertaken by MOEFCC that aims at strengthening the biosafety management system in India to ensure adequate protection of human health and biodiversity from potential risks arising from all LMO-related activities in agriculture. The third workshop of the series was held at Jnanajyothy Auditorium, Central College, Bangalore University, Bangalore on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

Recognizing the critical role of district level newspapers and publications Press Information Bureau in Bangalore had invited participants from different spheres, who deservedly benefitted the most in understanding the biosafety concept. The workshop had participants from national as well as regional media units viz. Deccan Chronicle, The Hindu, Indian Express, UNI, PTI, Vaartha Barathi, Hosadigantha, Samyukta Karnataka to name a few. Two representatives from community radio, Bangalore also attended the workshop.

To provide a holistic perspective on wide range of topics related to biosafety and its communication, reputed and learned speakers and research scientists actively involved in the field of plant/crop plant-biotechnology and associated organizations/institutes like Department of Biotechnology (DBT), M.S. Ramaiah Institute of Technology, Central Food Technological Research Institute and University of Bangalore were invited to deliver talks.

### **HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WORKSHOP**

#### **Day 1 – 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2015 Friday**

***Introduction and Technical Session I: Innovations in Biotechnology and Importance of the Biosafety Programme*** The workshop started with a brief overview on project objectives, aim, plan of action and anticipated outcomes of this novel initiative. The succeeding technical session familiarized the participants with the scope, concept of biotechnology, potential of this field of science in the area of agriculture and the status of biotechnological innovations in India and abroad. As the foundation session of 2 days workshop, this maiden slot described the basic terms, definitions, applied themes related to GMOs/LMOs and shed light on evolutionary technologies relevant to this field. The session also delineated information and predictions regarding the future trends in agri-biotechnology and its implications for India.

***Technical Session II: Why do we need Agri-biotechnology?*** This session gave an overview of agricultural technologies with a special emphasis on GM crops. It addressed various food security issues relevant to GM crops and cleared some of the misconceptions regarding GM crops.

**Technical Session III: Regional Media & its role in communicating science & technology** This session extensively discussed several issues, concerns, challenges faced by media professional/science communicators in reporting science and technology. It emphasized the vital role of regional media in bringing out clarity of the perception among public. It highlighted the need of organizing more knowledge-based and informative workshops for regional media professionals.



**Day 2 – 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2015 Saturday**

**Technical Session I: Safety Assessment and Biosafety Mechanisms of GM Crops in India** Day 2 of the workshop started with the session on safety assessment of GM crops in which the revered speaker detailed out various monitoring mechanisms and detection methods of GM crops covering environmental safety assessment, food and feed safety assessment and laboratory stage development prior to the commercial release.

**Technical Session II: Biosafety Regulatory Framework in India - Key Feature of Cartagena Protocol** This session gave a brief account of worldwide development of regulatory regimes for testing and handling of GM crops and their products with a special focus on Indian context. It meticulously outlined the roles and responsibilities of various organizations like Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), Review Committee on Genetic Manipulation (RCGM), State Biotechnology Coordination Committee (SBCC), District Level Committee (DLC), Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBSC) in successful implementation of biosafety regulatory regime in India. This session also extensively discussed the objective, scope and fundamentals of Cartagena protocol, the only international treaty so far, dedicated to the field of biosafety.



**Technical Session III: Biosafety Clearing House (BCH) and Information Sources/Databases on Biosafety** A discrete session was designed to provide adequate information regarding the web portals, links and databases (both online and offline) responsible for the dissemination of the facts, figures and updates in the field of agri-biotechnology, biosafety and science communication. This session delineated details related to Biosafety Clearing House and numerous other reliable sources of GMOs/LMOs and Biosafety for credible and authentic reporting.

#### **Group Work**

Post-lunch session of the workshop was dedicated for group-work activities where participants were invited to make presentations on the topics related to biosafety which was followed by interactive question-answer sessions. The broad areas assigned for the group-work were:

1. Innovations in Agri-Bio-technology and implications for the region,
2. Agricultural Productivity, Self-reliance and Farmers' issues in the Bio-safety regime,
3. Food, Nutrition and Bio-safety Issues for Consumers,
4. Socio-Economic aspects of Agri-Bio-technology,
5. Environment, Biodiversity issues and Bio-safety norms,
6. Dimensions of Regulation and Bio-safety norms in the country and the region.

#### **Valedictory session**

Two days workshops culminated with a formal valedictory session and certificate distribution to participants. Feedback/suggestions were collected from the participants through a structured questionnaire for the performance evaluation and nurturing further improvements in succeeding workshops to be conducted in near future as part of this series. It is expected that the feedback and suggestions from the workshops would enrich the national discourse on biosafety at various levels and would contribute to effective policy making on this promising field of agribiotechnology.

