

Media Workshop on Communicating Science and Biosafety

April 7th and 8th, 2015

New Delhi

A Brief Overview

Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), Delhi, a premier institution in mass communication education, training and research in collaboration with Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MOEF&CC), 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 MOEF&CC 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 first workshop of the series was held at Seminar Room, Teaching Block, IIMC, New Delhi on 7th and 8th April 2015.

The Workshop brought together Indian Information Officers (Group-A) belonging to diverse science and engineering backgrounds. These participants, nominated by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting represented AIR, AIR-NSD, Doordarshan, DD NEWS, Press Information Bureau (PIB) and Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB). Two CR representatives from Apna Radio, IIMC also attended the workshop.

To provide a holistic perspective on wide range of topics related to biosafety and its communication, alongwith eminent In house faculties from IIMC, 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), Indian Agriculture Research Institute (IARI), Biotech Consortium India Limited (BCIL), Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), SciDevNet and Digital Green were invited to deliver talks.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WORKSHOP

Day 1 – 7th April, 2015 Tuesday

Introduction and Technical Session I: Innovations in Biotechnology and Importance of the Bio-safety 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: 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 Bio-safety 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 extensive 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.



Technical Session IV: What Makes Science Report Interesting and Readable - Practice of Science Journalism in India

In this session realistic experiences from SciDevNet platform threw light on challenges faced by science communicators in achieving the twin objectives of making the story interesting as well as accurate besides focusing on neutral and innovative way of writing science.



Skype presentation on: Opportunities & Challenges in Covering Science - As a Public Broadcaster

A special skype presentation was organized for Ms. Helen Briggs, BBC correspondent from London and subsequent interaction with workshop participants. Highlighting the vital role of public broadcaster in communicating scientific issues, she shared her experience through a lively interaction with participants on various practical challenges/lessons learnt from the field while dealing with GM related information in British Media.



Day 2 – 8th April, 2015 Wednesday

Technical Session I: Safety Assessment of GM crops in India and Biosafety Mechanisms Day 2 of the workshop started with the session on safety assessment of GM crops in which the revered speaker through a lively interaction with participants detailed out the rigorous process of biosafety assessment

covering environmental safety assessment, food and feed safety assessment and laboratory stage development of GM crops prior to its commercial release.

Technical Session II: Making A Difference - Working with Digital Tools to Communicate

In order to provide a pragmatic experience to media professionals/science communicators, efforts have been made to facilitate interaction of workshop participants with experts/practioners from grassroot level. The case of Digital Green presented promising approaches to use digital media in empowering community of small farmers.



Using film as a medium of learning on scientific issues, a short documentary on Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was played in the following session.

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.



Round-up report presentation



Certificate distribution to participants

