

Media Workshop on Communicating Science and Biosafety

June 5th and 6th, 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 sixth workshop of the series was held at Seminar Room, Teaching Block, IIMC, New Delhi on 5th and 6th June 2015.

The Workshop brought together Indian Information Officers (Group-B) belonging to diverse science and engineering backgrounds. These participants, nominated by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting represented AIR, DD NEWS, Press Information Bureau (PIB), DAVP, DFP, DPD, New Media Cell and SMC. 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 Indian Agriculture Research Institute (IARI), National Bureau of Plant Genomic Research (NBPGR), Times of India, Reuters, Vigyan Prasar were invited to deliver talks.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WORKSHOP

Day 1 – 5th June, 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: Communicating Biotech: the Government Way. The relevance of social media and websites in communicating Biotechnological innovations was the key point in this session. The session had as its nucleus how DBT's initiative in feeding facts, figures and other pertinent information via its website is instrumental in timely spread of information, in stimulating participatory communication, dispelling existing fallacies regarding agri-biotechnology, esp GMOs/LMOs and in providing a platform that addresses public doubts without the domination of interest groups. The

session strove to acquaint the participants with DBT's further interest in increased interaction with the science fraternity through talk shows, interviews, discussions, thus encouraging science communication.

Technical Session III: Safety Assessment and Biosafety Mechanisms of GM Crops in India In this session 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 IV: 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.

Day 2 – 6th June, 2015 Saturday

Technical Session I: 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 II:

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.