

Media Workshop on Communicating Science and Biosafety

May 21st, 2015

Kolkata

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 fourth workshop of the series was held at Kadambini and Chandramukhi Hall, 3rd Floor of Central Library, University of Calcutta, Kolkata on 21st May 2015.



The Kolkata Workshop brought together participants from diverse media units covering national as well as regional streams viz. Ei Samay, Akhbar-E-Mashriq, Prabhat Khabor, Alipur Barta, Kolkata TV, The Statesman, Times of India, Anandabajar Patrika, PTI, IANS, Sangbad Pratidin, Duranta Barta, Jansatta, Hindustan Times, to name a few. Community Radio representatives from All India Radio, Fm Rainbow 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 Bose Institute, Visva Bharati University, South Asian Forum for Environment, University of Calcutta were invited to deliver talks.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WORKSHOP

Introduction and Technical Session I: Innovations in Biotechnology and Importance of the Biosafety Programme The workshop began with the inaugural speech by Prof. Tapati Basu from Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, University of Calcutta and subsequently advanced

through a brief overview presentation on project objectives, aim, plan of action and anticipated outcomes of this novel initiative by Prof. Gita Bamezai, Head, Department of Communication Research, IIMC, New Delhi. 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: Safety Assessment and Monitoring Mechanism of GM crops In the session on safety assessment of GM crops the revered speaker 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 their commercial release. He extensively discussed about the safety parameters, stringent safety standards to be maintained during the release of GM crops.



Technical Session III: Covering Biosafety Issues by Media: Dimensions of Risk Communication This session extensively discussed about the gaps and challenges for building capacities of mass media in reporting science and bio-safety issues in India. Citing numerous positive and negative reflections on GM crops, it urged media to act in a responsible way to generate pragmatic knowledge, attitudes, and perception on such issues in society.

Technical Session IV: Communication of Scientific Innovations This session touched upon several issues, concerns, challenges faced by media professional/science communicators in reporting science and technology. Highlighting emergence of science as an integral part of journalism over the past few years, it adjured media to avoid lame coverage and articulate awareness on scientific issues in laymen language to build up a harmonious relation with its target audience/readers.



Valedictory session

The workshop 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.