

BIOSAFETY

NEWSLETTER



NO 4

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Introduction

Much has happened since the issue of the UNEP-GEF Biosafety Newsletter No 3 in August 2002: recently the 50th country has ratified the Biosafety Protocol; the number of countries participating in the UNEP-GEF project on Development of National Biosafety Frameworks has risen to 117; and the UNEP-GEF demonstration projects on Implementation of National Biosafety Frameworks have started.

This newsletter gives an update on:

1. The 50th ratification of the Biosafety Protocol
2. The UNEP-GEF Global Project on Development of National Biosafety Frameworks
3. The UNEP-GEF Projects on Implementation of National Biosafety Frameworks
4. Other developments:
 - a. Capacity building for participation in the BCH
 - b. Changes in staff

At this moment, the UNEP-GEF Biosafety web site is being revised and updated. It is expected that the new version of the website will be on line in the course of July 2003.

1. THE 50TH RATIFICATION OF THE BIOSAFETY PROTOCOL

On 13 June 2003, the Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Mr. Hamdallah Zedan, announced that the 50th instrument of ratification of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety was deposited in New York and that in accordance with Article 37, the Protocol will therefore enter into force on 11 September 2003.

On the day of the 50th ratification, the Parties to the Protocol are: Austria, Barbados, Belarus, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Colombia, Croatia, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Ecuador, European Community, Fiji, France, Ghana, India, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Luxembourg, Maldives, Mali, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Mexico, Mozambique, Nauru, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Niue, Norway, Oman, Palau, Panama, Republic of Moldova, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Samoa, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Uganda, Ukraine, United Republic of Tanzania and Venezuela.

The first meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (COP-MOP) is scheduled to take place in the first quarter of 2004 in Kuala Lumpur.

Up to date information on the number of ratifications and on the COP-MOP can be found on the Convention on Biological Diversity web site at: <http://www.biodiv.org/biosafety>

2. THE UNEP-GEF GLOBAL PROJECT ON DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL BIOSAFETY FRAMEWORKS

Following the adoption of the GEF Initial Strategy on Biosafety in November 2000, the UNEP/GEF Global Project on the Development of National Biosafety Frameworks (NBF Development Project) was launched on 1 June 2001.

The Development Project was entrusted with an ambitious and challenging task to help up to 100 eligible countries build national capacity to comply with the obligations under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. This task is to be accomplished through assistance in setting up national biosafety frameworks for the management of living modified organisms with targeted training, technical support, information exchange and networking.

The development of a national biosafety framework typically results in a draft for a regulatory regime and an outline of a system to carry out that regulatory regime. Key to this development phase is the active involvement of all stakeholders.

Two years later: where do we stand?

Having reached its original target of 100 countries already in August 2002, the project currently has 117 participating states.

Last chance to join

A deadline of 30 June 2003 has been established by the Project Steering Committee for further countries' participation in the project. To join the project, an eligible country has to express its interest in participating through a letter from the national GEF focal point to UNEP. In case of countries that have not yet signed, acceded or ratified the Cartagena Protocol, an official letter must be sent to both the GEF and CBD Secretariats, and provide written assurance of the intention of the country to become a Party to the Protocol no later than a date of the completion of national activities foreseen in the project and that concrete steps have been initiated for this purpose

Thirteen more countries could join the NBF Development Project by the deadline of 30 June 2003: 6 in Africa, 3 in Central and Eastern Europe, 1 in Latin America and the Caribbean and 3 in Asia and the Pacific.

Figure 1 on page 3 shows the dynamics of the preparation and execution of NBF Development Projects worldwide. In summary, the current status of 117 participating countries is as follows: 112 countries have prepared their draft national project documents, 106 of these documents have already been approved while 79 national projects have started and are at different stages of their implementation.

Looking ahead

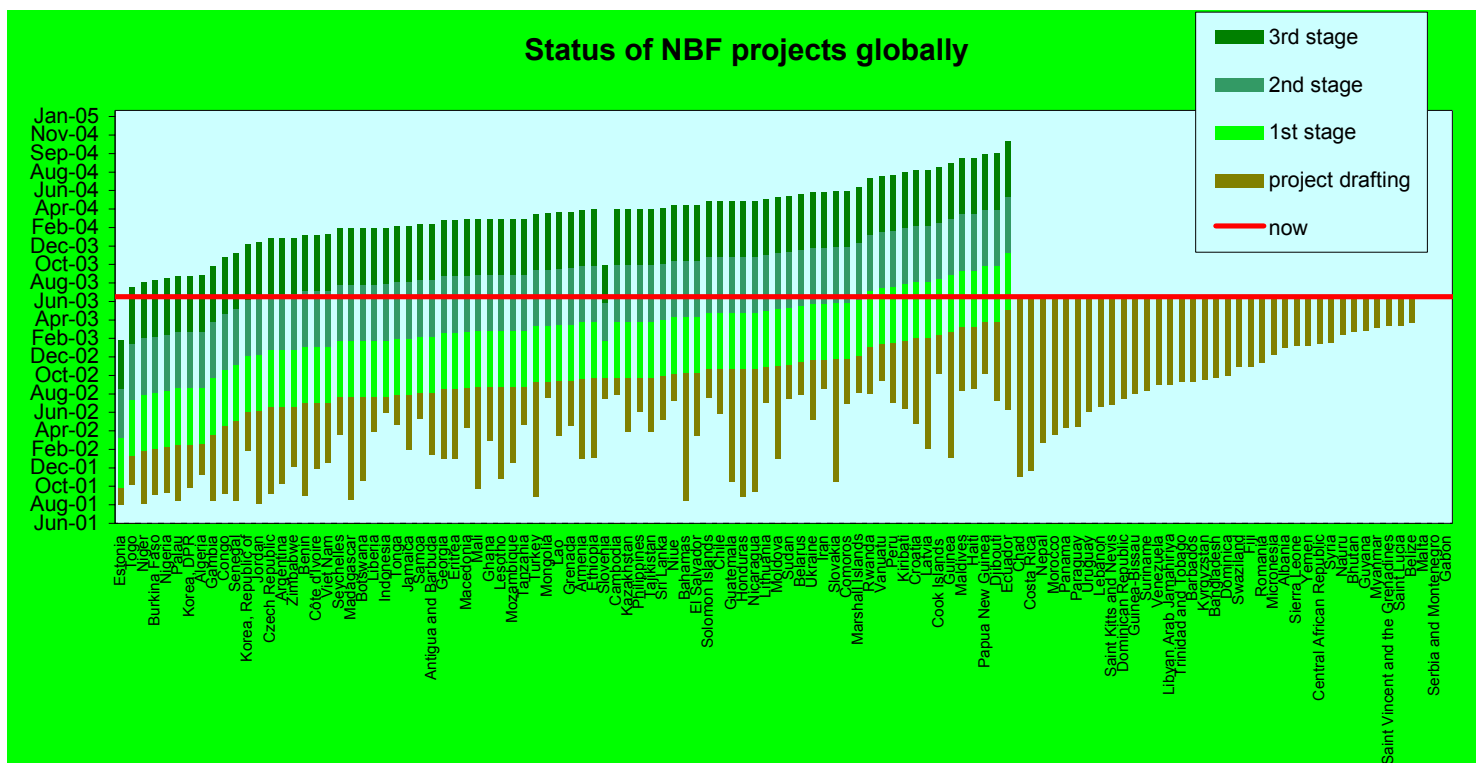
We expect that by the time of COP-MOP, 25 countries would have completed, or be about to complete, national activities carried out under their NBF Development Projects. These countries would therefore have developed drafts of administrative, regulatory and decision-making systems. A further 38 countries are expected to reach, by that date, advanced stages of their NBF Development Project.

Public participation and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

A study of the ways in which different countries have sought to promote and facilitate public awareness and participation in the design and implementation of their national biosafety frameworks has been undertaken with support of DFID, the UK Government Department for International Development. The study served as a background paper for the related sub-regional training workshops. The study documents and analyses the experiences of a representative selection of countries in their efforts to fulfil the obligations under Article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol. The aim of this study is to assist policy-makers by identifying and assessing a range of tools and approaches that may help to promote and facilitate public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms.

To obtain a copy of the study, please visit the UNEP-GEF Biosafety web site or contact our Team at biosafety@unep.ch

Figure 1



Training workshops

recent...

The second series of sub-regional training workshops was held from November 2002 to May 2003. In all sub-regions the training was organised in the form of two parallel workshops, one of them aiming at building capacity in risk assessment and management, the other focussing on public awareness, participation and education. The training was attended by more than 480 participants from 127 countries and invitees from countries involved in NBF implementation projects. Individual workshop reports are available on the UNEP-GEF Biosafety web site while a synthesis report summarising results and findings of this second series of workshops will soon be available on the web site and widely distributed electronically.

... and forthcoming

A third series of workshops is planned to be held, again at sub-regional level, between October 2003 and April 2004. These workshops will help countries work on the legal and administrative aspects of the development of their national biosafety frameworks.

3. THE UNEP-GEF PROJECTS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL BIOSAFETY FRAMEWORKS

A second component of the GEF Initial Strategy on Biosafety, which was adopted in November 2000, is the commencement of projects aimed at assisting countries with the **implementation** of their national biosafety frameworks.

In the implementation phase, countries move on to the stage in which the draft regulatory regime and any necessary implementing regulations are finalized and in which workable and transparent systems are set up for handling requests for permits, monitoring and inspections, and public awareness and information.

In November 2001, the GEF Council approved 12 proposals for demonstration projects to support countries with the implementation of their national biosafety frameworks. Two of those projects are coordinated by the World Bank (India and Colombia), two by the United Nations Development Programme (Malaysia and Mexico) and 8 of them by UNEP.

The 8 Projects on Implementation of National Biosafety Frameworks (NBF Implementation Projects) that are supported by UNEP are: Bulgaria, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Kenya, Namibia, Poland and Uganda. These NBF Implementation Projects started in the second half of 2002 and will last 3 years. Project budgets vary from 600,000 USD to 1,200,000.

Activities in the period September 2002 – December 2003

In September 2002, a cash advance was transferred to the 8 countries for the purpose of laying the groundwork for the project, e.g. procurement of computers, arrangement of office space etc.

In October 2002, the national coordinators of the projects participated in a workshop on Implementation of biosafety frameworks, in Gödöllő, Hungary. This workshop, which was part of the project “Implementation of national biosafety frameworks in pre-accession countries in Central and Eastern Europe”, allowed the national coordinators and UNEP representatives to make arrangements to ensure that the Implementation Projects started in a harmonized fashion.

The Programme Manager of the UNEP-GEF Projects on Implementation of National Biosafety Frameworks, Piet van der Meer, took office on 1 December 2002.

Activities in the period January 2003 – August 2003

In communication between the national project coordinators and the Programme Manager, it was agreed that the overall target of the NBF Implementation Projects is that by the end of the project period, the biosafety framework in each of the participating countries is “up and running”, i.e. by the end of the project period, they will have in place:

- ❖ A regulatory regime for biosafety has come into force and is in line with the Biosafety Protocol and other relevant international obligations,
- ❖ Workable and transparent implementing systems for handling requests, monitoring and inspections,

- ❖ A system for passing information to the public and that public participation is functioning.

In the period January 2003 – August 2003, the following start up activities were scheduled for each of the participating countries:

1. obtaining a detailed picture of the state of developments at the start of the projects,
2. review of draft legislation by international panels of legal experts.
3. holding 4 day start up workshops, and introductory seminars for Parliamentarians
4. drafting of fine tuned plans of action for the remainder of the Projects.

Obtaining a picture of the state of developments at the start of the Projects

For each of the participating countries, a picture was produced of the state of development of the main components of the national biosafety frameworks at the start of the Implementation Projects

Summaries of the state of developments will be made available on the UNEP-GEF Biosafety web site.

Review of draft legislation by international panels of legal experts

Drafts of biosafety legislation and regulations of Bulgaria, Cameroon, Kenya, Namibia and Uganda were reviewed by international panels of experts from the CBD Secretariat, countries where biosafety frameworks have been in place, academia, NGOs and the private sector.

The detailed comments by the reviewers were provided to the national coordinators, national coordinating committees and involved government officials, who in most cases followed up with specific questions to the reviewers.

Start up workshops

Start up workshops were scheduled to address the main 5 components of the national biosafety frameworks (see above) in detail. In most cases

these start up workshops were preceded by a one-day introductory seminar for parliamentarians. The start up workshops were open to observers from NGOs, the private sector, media and other countries.

In the start up workshops, experts from the international organizations, such as the CBD Secretariat, ISNAR and OECD, countries where biosafety frameworks have been in place for several years, academia, NGOs and the private sector participated as resource persons.

Start up workshops were held in: Bulgaria (11-13 February 2003), Namibia (11-16 March), Cameroon (8-11 April 2003) Kenya (14-18 April 2003), Cuba (18-20 May) and Uganda (26-31 May 2003). Workshops in Poland and China are scheduled in the period July – September 2003.

Fine tuned plans of action

Following each start up workshop, the national coordinators, the coordination committees, the resource persons and the Programme Manager all met to discuss fine tuned plans of activities for the remainder of the project, including the targets to be reached within the project period for each of the main components of the national biosafety framework.

These fine tuned plans of activities, together with the summary of the state of developments at the start of the projects and the progress reports are included in one project document which will be made available on the UNEP-GEF Biosafety web site.

Future activities

In the next period, the following activities are envisaged:

- ❖ Assisting the participating countries with the implementation of their fine tuned plans of activities in the period until 2005
- ❖ Assisting other countries that have indicated a wish to submit a proposal for a UNEP-GEF Projects on Implementation of National Biosafety Frameworks with preparing such proposals
- ❖ Further development of practical tools for the implementation of national biosafety frameworks, such as

- A manual with general guidance on regulatory regimes for biosafety, handling requests for permits, monitoring and inspections and public awareness and information,
- A database called “Gene Files” with relevant information about genes that are frequently used in genetic modification, and a database called “Botanical Files” with relevant information about crop plants that are frequently used for genetic modification.

Collaboration with other projects

The NBF Development Project and Implementation Project teams are working closely together to ensure consistency between the two phases of the GEF Initial Strategy.

With regard to other capacity building activities, it is recognized that the UNEP-GEF Implementation Projects are in most cases not the only biosafety capacity building projects in these countries. In many cases there are other ongoing or planned biosafety capacity activities initiated by governments, national organizations and international organizations.

In order to allow the beneficiary countries to make optimal use of the available sources and to ensure synergy of activities, the Implementation Project team has sought close collaboration with, among others, the CBD Secretariat, IUCN, BIOEARN, FAO, WHO, UNDP, UNIDO, World Bank, ISAAA, ISNAR, OECD and the USAID-PBS Programme, as well as with a number of governments active in biosafety capacity building.

More information

More information about the Implementation Projects will soon be placed on the UNEP-GEF Biosafety web site.

Questions about the UNEP-GEF Projects on Implementation of National Biosafety Frameworks can be directed to the Programme Manager, Piet van der Meer, email: Piet.vanderMeer@unep.ch

4A. CAPACITY BUILDING FOR EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE BCH

The Biosafety Clearing House (BCH) is established by Article 20 of the Cartagena Protocol in order to facilitate the exchange of scientific, technical, environmental and legal information on, and experience with, living modified organisms. At its first meeting (Montpellier, France, 11-15 December 2000) the Intergovernmental Committee for the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (ICCP) recommended the development of a pilot phase of the BCH and later on urged donors to provide financial support and technical assistance to enable developing countries to access and use the pilot BCH.

With a view to assessing and evaluating existing resources available in countries for the participation in the BCH and addressing related capacity building needs, the UNEP-GEF Biosafety Team cooperated with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity to send out in February 2003 a comprehensive questionnaire on the access and use of the Biosafety Clearing House. We are sincerely grateful to over 90 respondents, who provided us with valuable data and information on their national conditions and requirements. A majority of the respondents (71.7%) indicated the kind of assistance they would like to receive in order to improve their use of the BCH. These focussed mainly on **training**: in use of the BCH (62.1%) and information management (50%). Other areas for assistance included hardware (25.8%), financial support (19.7%), information on BCH (19.7%), software (18.2%), technical support (18.2%), and better Internet connection (10.6%).

The aggregated data of the questionnaire provided one of the inputs for the preparation, by UNEP in collaboration with the Secretariat of the CBD, of a full-sized GEF Project Proposal on Capacity Building for effective participation in the BCH for the Cartagena Protocol. The new Project, if approved by the GEF, will aim to strengthen capacity in eligible countries to access and use the BCH. Further information will be available later on the UNEP-GEF Biosafety web site.

4B. CHANGES IN STAFF

Since the last UNEP-GEF Biosafety Newsletter, there have been a number of changes in the composition of the Biosafety Team:

On December 1, 2002, **Piet van der Meer** was appointed Programme Manager of the UNEP-GEF Projects on Implementation of National Biosafety Frameworks. Piet is a lawyer and a biologist, who from 1990 until 1999 was in charge of implementing the biosafety framework of the Netherlands. From 1999 until November 2002 he coordinated the Dutch funded biosafety capacity building project "Implementation of National Biosafety Frameworks of pre-accession countries in Central and Eastern Europe".

On June 1, 2003, **Alessandra Sensi** joined the team and will have as a primary task supporting the preparation of new GEF proposals, such as proposals for the BCH capacity building project. Before joining the team, Alessandra was a Task Manager for Biosafety at UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi. She successfully assisted 8 countries to prepare UNEP-GEF Implementation Projects.

On June 1, 2003, **Frédéric Delpéch** joined to strengthen the administrative team. Frédéric worked several years as security manager for a company producing security holograms, and later as Project Assistant at the UNEP Post-Conflict Assessment Unit.

On June 21, 2003, **Keneti Faulalo** joined the team as the assistant regional coordinator for the Pacific Island Communities for the NBF Development Project. Keneti has been programme manager for NZAID from 1999 to the present in managing environment programs across the Pacific. This position has been created in response of the need to adequately support the needs of the Pacific Island Communities.

On 1 July 2003, **David Heron** will join for a period of one or two years to assist executing the NBF Implementation Projects. From 1991 until 2003 David was a senior biotechnologist responsible for conducting risk assessments as part of the regulatory program within USDA-APHIS that regulates genetically engineered plants, micro-organisms, and arthropods. David has been active in domestic and international policy development for agricultural biotechnology, as well as drafting and implementing all aspects of the regulations. David served as one of the drafters of the 1993 and 1997 revisions of the USDA-APHIS biotechnology regulations and has participated frequently as trainer in training workshops on biosafety all over the world.

The Biosafety Team regrets the departure of the indispensable **Janine Jamieson**, administrative assistant of the team, who left for a sunnier region in France. We warmly thank Janine for her professionalism, dedication, commitment and smiles, and wish her all success in her new endeavours.

The Team also regrets that **Andrea Gondova**, the assistant regional coordinator for Central and Eastern Europe for the NBF Development Project will leave her post by the end of July to settle in the Netherlands. The team and also our colleagues in Central and Eastern Europe warmly appreciate all that she has done for the region.

We hope that both Janine and Andrea will remain in touch with us all.

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