

**Asian Regional Workshop on Sustainable Agriculture, Biotechnology and Biosafety
10-11 January 2012, Bangkok, Thailand**

Chair's Summary

1. Introduction

In 2012 and 2013, a number of international meetings are scheduled that will be of key importance to the global debate on sustainable agriculture, biotechnology and biosafety:

- The Earth Summit titled “Rio+20”, (20-22 June 2012, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)
- The 6th Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (1-5 October 2012, Hyderabad, India).
- The CSD-20, scheduled to assess the progress made with Chapter 16 of Agenda 21.

The Public Research and Regulation Initiative (PRRI), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)/Program for Biosafety Systems and the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA), will organise in 2012 various regional workshops to address Rio+20, CPB, CBD and CSD-20.

The aim of these workshops is to provide an opportunity to informally discuss topics on the agenda of these global events, how these events are interrelated, how they are related to other international fora such as the WTO, and how outcomes of these events can be implemented at the national level.

The first of these regional workshops was held on 10 and 11 January 2012, in Bangkok, Thailand. The workshop was attended by more than 80 participants from 17 countries in the Asia-Pacific region and 53 international, regional and national organisations.

The program and presentations of the workshop can be found on:

<http://www.isaaa.org/workshop/2012-01-10-bangkok/>

and

http://www.bic.searca.org/seminar_proceedings/2012/bangkok2012/bangkok2012.rar.

Below is summary of the workshop produced by the workshop Chair Dr. Randy A. Hautea and principal workshop facilitator Mr. Piet van der Meer. These notes are produced with the intention of giving a flavour of the presentations and the discussions, but are not intended to suggest consensus among participants.

2. Setting the scene – Food security

To “set scene” of the workshop, introductions were given on:

- “Food Security and world changes and trends since 1992”, illustrating the escalating challenges the world faces towards food security: growth of the population, changing consumption patterns, environmental degradation, climate change, et cetera.
- “The potential of biotechnology to strengthen sustainable agriculture – an Asian perspective”, discussing a range of biotechnologies, including marker-aided selection, diagnostic and early detection tools, and genetic engineering for improved yield and pest resistance traits.

3. Rio+20

An introduction was given to the background and history of the Rio+20, i.e. the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro 1992 - Agenda 21, Rio Declaration).

Rio+20 will be held on 20-22 June 2012, in Rio de Janeiro, <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20>

The main topics on the agenda of Rio+20 are:

- Green economy in the context of sustainable development poverty eradication
- Institutional framework for sustainable development

The workshop participants discussed that greening the economy requires change in both consumption and production. With regard to production, change and action are required in many different fields such as the production of energy, and the production of food, feed and biomass.

Given that there is no internationally agreed definition of “sustainable agriculture”, and given that the concept of sustainable agriculture itself encompasses many different aspects, participants discussed various parameters of sustainable agriculture:

- **Strengthening food security:** strengthening national self sufficiency and contributing to the required 70% increase of the global production of food, feed and biomass in the years to come; contributing through sustainable intensification; strengthening food quality such as nutritional quality.
- **Environmentally sustainable**, e.g.: reduce dependence on pesticides, fertilizers, and irrigation; reduce soil erosion and conversion of natural habitats into agricultural land; increase energy efficiency; mitigate climate change and the effects of climate change; reduce depletion of ground water resources, support biodiversity and maintain or improve ecosystem functions.
- **Socially just**, e.g.: producing food and feed that is affordable for the poor; encouraging the younger generation to stay or become farmers; local adaptability; improving farmers health; enlightening and empowering farmers; maintaining traditional knowledge of farmers.

- **Economical**, e.g.: economically viable in case of scale up; accessibility of technology to farmers; value-adding to farmers, investments in infrastructure and science; market mechanisms.

Participants discussed possible sources that can be used to identify appropriate biotechnological approaches, such as the detailed program areas in Chapter 16 of Agenda 21.

Also discussed was a matrix that lists main challenges for key agricultural crops and production animals, such as pests and diseases, and research into possible biotechnological approaches that can help address those challenges.

4. Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB, <http://bch.cbd.int/protocol>)

Introductions were given on the background and history of the Convention of Biological Diversity, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB), and main functions of the CPB, including:

- procedures for transboundary movement of LMOs in absence of national regulations, e.g. the “AIA” procedure.
- Principles and methodology for environmental risk assessment.
- Mechanism for information sharing - the Biosafety Clearing House (BCH).

Introductions were also given on the functioning and history of Meetings of the Parties to the CPB (MOPs), the outcome of MOP5, including *Liability and Redress* and key topics on the agenda of MOP6, such as *risk assessment* and *socio-economic considerations*.

4.a. Liability and Redress

Introductions were given on key terms and distinctions, article 27 of the CPB, the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress (‘Supplementary Protocol’), national implementation and a complementary instrument developed by the private sector called “the Compact”.

The discussion addressed the need to clearly distinguish liability and redress from criminal sanctions; traditional damage (e.g. economic damage) from damage to public goods (e.g. biological diversity); strict liability from fault based liability; and an administrative system from a civil liability system.

It was explained that the Supplementary Protocol (SP) establishes an administrative system to deal with liability and redress related to possible damage to biological diversity resulting from the transboundary movement of LMOs.

The discussion further elaborated on key elements of a workable and effective national liability system. A comprehensive overview was given of the stepwise approach in implementing the SP. Detailed explanation was given of the key elements included in the SP, *inter alia* the definition of damage to biological diversity, the notion of a baseline/reference point, the need to establish causality and the concept of response measures.

4b. Risk Assessment

Presentations were given on the general principles and methodology of risk assessment, practical experiences in Asia, capacity building, and Asian regional collaboration and education network.

An introduction was also given on the process of developing guidance documents on risk assessment, involving an Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on risk assessment and risk management (AHTEG) and various open ended on-line discussions.

In addressing the overall utility and applicability of the draft guidance documents produced thus far, participants discussed important parameters for useful guidance documents:

- consistent with Annex III of the Protocol and strengthen confidence to conduct RAs;
- scientifically valid and evidence-based, taking into account relevant experience from other risk assessments;
- the importance to distinguish risk assessment from risk management and clarify that the precautionary approach is applied in decision-making;
- language should be simple, direct, and easily translatable into other languages;
- use well-established terminology from biology whenever possible, and not redefine terms;
- support concepts and ideas with relevant examples; and
- developed by people with substantial experience in conducting RAs for decision making.

4c. Socio-Economic considerations

Introductions were given on article 26 of the CPB, and on socio-economic assessments, including practical considerations, options and implications.

Various examples were given of actual assessments of socio-economic assessments.

5. Closing session:

In the closing session, participants expressed appreciation for this unique opportunity to be introduced to the various topics in different international fora, and to have an informal exchange of views on those topics and how they relate to each other.

The organisers were urged to repeat this exercise once more before MOP6.

Several participants suggested to extend the workshop to 3 days, and to include parallel sessions to have in-depth discussions and hands-on training on issues such as RA, L&R and socio-economic considerations.