

## Special Feature

# BIOSAFETY CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES IN MALAYSIA

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The Government of Malaysia (GoM) has identified biotechnology as one of the new income sources of the nation. Under the 3rd National Agriculture Policy for 1998-2010 (NAP3), biotechnology was identified as one of the five core technologies to transform the country into a highly industrialized nation by 2020. The National Biotechnology Policy was launched in April 2005. With increasing emphasis on biotechnology, the GoM in 1997 demonstrated its commitment to biosafety by producing a set of voluntary National Guidelines for the Release of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) into the Environment. A Genetic Modification Advisory Committee (GMAC) was set up to assist the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) on Biosafety matters. This was followed with the drafting of a Biosafety Act. After Malaysia signed the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB) on 24 May 2000, the Biosafety Bill was re-drafted to harmonize with the CPB. Malaysia ratified the CPB on September 2003 and the Biosafety Bill was passed in Parliament in July 2007.

Biosafety Capacity Building is a key prerequisite for the effective implementation of the CPB as well the National Biosafety Act. In order to be able to effectively implement our Biosafety Act and meet our International obligations, appropriate institutional mechanisms and infrastructure, well-trained human resources, adequate funding as well as easy access to relevant information must be in place.

NRE and other government agencies are do not have sufficient capacity to effectively implement the Biosafety Act 2007 as there are insufficient capacities in risk assessment and risk management, administrative and regulatory implementation. The project will help Malaysia build capacity to undertake these tasks as well as to build channels for information dissemination and public participation.

Support to Capacity Building Activities on Implementing the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafet and the National Biosafety Act, a project funded by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), led by NRE with support from UNDP Malaysia was implemented in 2007 to answer the above needs.

The overall goal of this project is to assist Malaysia to fully implement the obligations under the Cartagena Protocol related to the transboundary movement of LMOs. This includes the assessment, management and long term monitoring of the risks to the sustainable use of biodiversity and to human health potentially posed by the introduction of LMOs.

The objective of this project is that at the end of the three years, there will be sufficient capacity in the country and effective coordination between the responsible agencies to assess and manage risks associated with the transboundary movement of LMOs. This will be achieved through the strengthening of the

national biosafety framework with the necessary regulations, enhanced technical capacity and enforcement and monitoring capacities as well as a well managed information and coordination network.

The main activities of this project are to support Malaysia to establish legal and regulatory framework that permits the effective evaluation, enhance scientific, socio-economic and institutional capacities for risk assessment, increase capacity for developing and implementing a risk management programme, develop capacity for long-term regime building maintenance, develop institutional coordination and sharing of information, raise public awareness relative to the transboundary movement of LMOs and promote participation of stakeholders.

The project has carried out various workshops to build national capacities on risk assessment and risk management of various living modified organisms (LMOs) among both scientists and regulators. The range of LMOs covered is crops and insects and in the near future, trees, microbes and animals will also be targeted.

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