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United Nations
Environment Programme

UNEP-GEF Biosafety Projects



GEF

Global Environment
Facility

A horizontal silhouette strip containing various icons related to biosafety and the environment, including a DNA helix, a person working in a field, a large tree, a tractor, a windmill, and laboratory glassware.

UNEP's Support for Biosafety Capacity Building in GEF-4

An Interim Update

November 2007

A photograph of a lush green rice paddy field in the foreground, with a dense line of palm trees in the middle ground, and a large, conical volcano in the background under a clear blue sky.

Support for Biosafety Capacity Building in GEF-4
An Interim Update
(UNEP DGEF Biosafety , November 2007)

1. Introduction

The GEF “Strategy for Financing Biosafety ([GEF/C.30/8/Rev.1](#)), was adopted on an interim basis by Council in June 2006, and finally approved as part of the Focal Area Strategies and Strategic Programming for GEF-4 ([GEF/C.31/10](#)).

The objective of the GEF “Strategy for Financing Biosafety ([GEF/C.30/8/Rev.1](#)) is “to help build the capacity of eligible countries¹ to implement the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB) through activities at the national, sub-regional and regional levels”.

Support for this objective in most eligible countries allows them to build on the capacity building activities already financed by the GEF and participating countries and implemented through 2 global projects entitled “ Development of National Biosafety Frameworks” and “ Building Capacity for Effective Participation in the Biosafety Clearing House (BCH)”, 12 demonstration implementation projects, 11 NBF implementation projects and 2 regional projects in Latin America and West Africa approved under GEF-3.

2. Status of approved projects

The global “Development of National Biosafety Frameworks (NBF)” project (US\$ 34. million from GEF, plus US\$ 3. million in co-financing) comprised two major components:

- (i) working with up to 123 individual countries to develop National Biosafety Frameworks, and
- (ii) promoting regional and sub-regional collaboration on biosafety issues.

As of December 2006, 123 countries were participating in the NBF Development Project when participation in the project was closed. By November 2007, 92 countries have completed draft NBFs and posted them to the UNEP Biosafety Unit [website](#)², with the remaining countries to follow before final project closure. The second component involved promoting collaboration and exchange of experiences on biosafety among countries. The project has convened 16 regional and sub-regional workshops, and smaller meetings focusing on sub-regional collaboration. These meetings and workshops help national project staff to increase their knowledge and learning from one another. They promote south-south collaboration and networking, with countries increasingly requesting technical assistance from other developing countries that have done similar work.

The global “Building Capacity for Effective Participation in the Biosafety Clearing House (BCH)” project (US\$ 13.5 million from GEF plus US\$ 1.4 million in co-financing). As of November 2007, 121 countries were participating in the BCH Project. The Biosafety Unit has produced an operational handbook, training modules, and case studies and has established a pool of Regional Advisors to whom participating countries can turn for help in making BCH

¹ CBD COP Decision VII/20

² <http://www.unep.ch/biosafety/news.htm#nbf>

participation decisions. In collaboration with the governments of Canada, Switzerland, and the USA, the BCH Project is providing assistance to help countries set up national BCH components.

During GEF-3 (2002-2006), UNEP worked with 8³ of 12 demonstration implementation countries, (total financing US\$ 4.8 million from GEF, plus US\$.2 million in co-financing). Two countries (Colombia and India) worked with the World Bank, and 2 countries (Malaysia and Mexico) worked with UNDP. All projects are complete now with the exception of the Malaysia project. In 2006, 11 additional implementation projects⁴ were approved under GEF-3 – these will run until 2010. Another 5 countries⁵ had biosafety implementation projects technically-cleared during 2006, but failed to get CEO approval before the end of GEF-3 funding. Of these 5, Ghana, Liberia and Tajikistan are resubmitting their proposals in GEF-4, whilst Latvia has subsequently become ineligible for GEF funding.

UNEP's work with countries on biosafety formed a major part of the evaluation of the GEF Support to Biosafety (see [GEF/ME/C.28/Inf.1](#)). In addition, UNEP has recently commissioned a "lessons learned" for the eight 8 UNEP-led (demonstration) NBF implementation projects – a summary of this exercise is at Annex 1 along with some early emerging lessons from the BCH project.

During GEF-3 the Council approved two regional projects developed by the World Bank. One, the West Africa Regional Biosafety Program (GEF Project ID 2911), has recently been endorsed, whilst the other, Latin America: Capacity-Building for Compliance with the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (GEF Project ID 2689), will be endorsed soon.

2. National Prioritisation of Biosafety under the Resource Allocation Framework

Following the introduction of the Resource Allocation Framework (RAF) for the Biodiversity and Climate Change focal areas in July 2006, countries assigned an indicative allocation of funds by the GEF are required to provide information on prioritization of projects identified for implementation under the RAF in consultation with the GEF Secretariat

To date, 128 letters from GEF Secretariat summarizing national prioritization of projects for biodiversity have been posted on the GEF website. A number of countries are yet to complete the prioritization process and some are considering revising their prioritizations following further in-country consultations. Analysis of these letters and other subsequent communications from countries indicates that at least 43 countries have prioritized a biosafety project as part of their biodiversity portfolio for GEF-4.

These are: Albania; Armenia; Bahamas; Barbados; Cambodia; Cameroon; Chad; Congo; Costa Rica; Croatia, Dominica; Ecuador; El Salvador; Gambia; Ghana, Guatemala; Honduras; India; Indonesia; Jamaica; Jordan; Kyrgyzstan; Lao (PDR); Lesotho, Macedonia (FYR); Madagascar; Moldova; Mozambique; Namibia; Nigeria; Panama; Papua New Guinea; Peru; Romania; Rwanda; Saint Lucia; Senegal; Sudan; Swaziland; Syrian Arab Republic; Tajikistan; Togo and Yemen⁶.

³ Bulgaria, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Kenya, Namibia, Poland, Uganda

⁴ Cambodia, Czech Republic, Egypt, Estonia, Lithuania, Mauritius, Moldova, Slovakia, Tanzania, Tunisia, Viet Nam

⁵ Ghana, Korea DPR, Latvia, Liberia and Tajikistan

In addition, Bhutan, Cuba and Sri Lanka have indicated that biosafety will be a priority in their biodiversity focal area, whilst Belize, Guyana, Liberia, Malaysia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, St. Kitts & Nevis, Thailand and Viet Nam have indicated that they wish to revise their priorities to now include biosafety, and to work with UNEP, making a total of 54 countries. Enquiries about the possibility of developing a biosafety project with UNEP have also been received from Bangladesh, Nepal, Iran, Jordan, Liberia, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Uruguay and Venezuela, although these countries do not have a prioritization letter mentioning biosafety.

In November 2006, 12 of these countries⁷ were added to the biodiversity pipeline for 2007 and entered into the GEF project database, (without needing to complete a Project Identification Form (PIF)⁸. All of these countries have been working with UNEP as their chosen Agency to develop their proposals, some of which are now ready for submission – these proposals will be submitted for approval along with the Program Document for Biosafety (see below).

3. Programming Document for Biosafety Capacity Building

On 12th March 2007, the GEF CEO invited UNEP to take *“the lead role, in close collaboration with the GEF Secretariat, in the development of a strategic approach for programming resources for biosafety capacity building for the November 2007 Council”*⁹.

To date, the following GEF Agencies, have expressed an interest in collaborating with UNEP in the biosafety programme:

Asian Development Bank (ADB)
UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
World Bank (WB)

Following preliminary discussions with GEF Secretariat in April/May 2007 and June and August 2007, WB and FAO indicated that they were not yet in a position to describe their strategic approach or submit lists of potential projects, and requested, in August 2007, that submission of their contribution to the strategic approach be delayed until the April 2008 Council. The request was granted by the GEF Secretariat.

Between November 2007 and February 2008, UNEP will continue to work with the other Agencies and the GEF Secretariat to develop a strategic approach document for consideration by Council in April 2008. The Program Document for the strategic approach will be accompanied by the first tranche of biosafety proposals under GEF-4.

The GEF Strategy for Financing Biosafety recognizes three major types of support to be provided. Below we provide a brief summary of UNEP’s ongoing collaboration with countries and other partners to move forward in all three areas.

⁷ Albania; Armenia; Cameroon; Costa Rica, Cote D’Ivoire, Ecuador; El Salvador; Indonesia; Lesotho; Madagascar; Peru and Romania.

⁸ One (Cote d’Ivoire) of these 12 countries was subsequently found to be currently ineligible for GEF funding for biosafety as it has yet to accede to the CPB.

⁹ Letter from GEF CEO to UNEP Executive Director

(a) Regional and Sub-Regional Projects

Countries participating in the UNEP GEF project for the Development of National Biosafety Frameworks benefited greatly from their involvement in the Regional and Sub-Regional Workshops¹⁰. As a result of this experience, many countries have expressed an interest in incorporating regional activities into the implementation phase of their national biosafety frameworks. These regional activities have, however, always been regarded by countries as complementary to, rather than replacements for, national level activities which form the basis of the establishment of a sustainable national biosafety system and in direct response to their obligations under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

With the introduction of the RAF, and the exclusion of biosafety projects from the Global and Regional Exclusion (GRE) fund, it has proven more difficult for countries to build a critical mass of support for regional approaches and most countries, especially those in the “Group”, have found it necessary to prioritise limited resources for national activities. Exceptions to this trend are to be found in regions where there is already a recognized need for, and history of, regional approaches to environmental problems (e.g. SIDS), or where an international or regional “centre of excellence” can act as catalyst/focus for the regional activities (e.g. ICARDA for the UNEP WANA project and CIAT for the current WB project in Latin America).

Three of 9 regional biosafety concepts that UNEP submitted to GEF-3 are still being developed further as regional projects for submission in GEF-4. These are for the Caribbean¹¹, Pacific¹², and West Asia/North Africa (WANA) regions¹³. For the Caribbean and Pacific regions, these regional approaches for biosafety will now need to be incorporated into the proposed GEF Caribbean Alliance for Sustainability (CAS) and Pacific Alliance for Sustainability (PAS) respectively. In addition, the East and Central Africa Regions have initiated consultation, with support from the Swedish Trust Fund under UNEP, on the Project “Implementation of MEAs: Developing a multi-country approach in support of country implementation of National Biosafety Frameworks in the Central and Eastern African Region”. These consultations led to develop a project proposal for support using GEF and other potential sources of funding from national and donor sources. The activities proposed are to be supported technically by the Biosciences East and Central African network hub in Nairobi Kenya and UNEP.

Regional or sub-regional approaches will probably not now develop in other regions, unless they are for fairly small groups of countries linking to a “centre of excellence” model, or are multi-county projects focused on a specific issue (see (c) below).

¹⁰ pp21-22 of “Evaluation of GEF Support for Biosafety” ([GEF/ME/C.28/Inf.1](#))

¹¹ **Caribbean**: Antigua & Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad & Tobago

¹² **Pacific**: Cook islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu

¹³ **WANA**: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen, (in partnership with Kuwait, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar and Saudi Arabia). This project is being developed in collaboration with FAO and ICARDA.

(b) National Projects

As of 1st November 2007, 92 countries have completed their NBF Development projects¹⁴. In addition, 10 of the countries that participated in the Pilot Biosafety Project did not participate in the demonstration projects for NBF implementation¹⁵ and two eligible countries¹⁶ did not join the NBF Development project because they developed NBFs without GEF support. In addition, 2 new GEF members (Somalia and Timor-Leste) have become eligible for biosafety support in the group.

Of these 106 countries, 11¹⁷ have stand-alone national NBF implementation projects already approved under GEF-3. Of the remaining 95, 14¹⁸ are currently ineligible for GEF support for biosafety until they complete ratification of the CPB, whilst Latvia has graduated from further GEF support for biodiversity/biosafety in GEF-4.

Of the 90 remaining countries, 23¹⁹ may be involved in the regional projects described above, leaving a total of 67 countries, of which most are discussing or preparing national implementation proposals in collaboration with UNEP (see the list in Section 2 above).

In addition to the countries listed in Section 2 above, a number of other countries, especially those in the Group which have already submitted a GEF-4 Phase 1 biodiversity project, are considering a second proposal for the biodiversity focal area which may focus on biosafety.

(c) Issue-specific Projects

The UNEP-GEF “Global Project for the Effective participation in the Biosafety Clearing House (BCH)” is a successful example of an issue-specific approach, whereby 120 countries have been able to address their capacity building needs in relation to the BCH and its use as an information and compliance instrument of the Cartagena Protocol. Given its global outreach, countries have also benefited from regional and sub-regional associations and from the large-scale provision of training and information resources.

As of October 2007, only a few countries had proposed issue-specific approaches beyond the BCH and, to date, no multi-country project have been proposed for development to UNEP.

It is clear from UNEP experience in working with countries during the NBF development and implementation projects that the following other issues are potential candidates for this kind of approach:

- (i) Documentation, Labeling, and other Information Management;
- (ii) Risk Assessment/Risk Management (RA/RM);
- (iii) Monitoring for environmental impact; and

¹⁴ see NBFs posted at UNEP GEF Biosafety website: <http://www.unep.ch/biosafety/news.htm#nbf>

¹⁵ Bolivia, Egypt, Hungary, Malawi, Mauritania, Morocco, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Tunisia, Zambia

¹⁶ Brazil and South Africa

¹⁷ Cambodia, Czech Republic, Egypt, Estonia, Lithuania, Mauritius, Moldova, Slovakia, Tunisia, United Republic of Tanzania, Vietnam. (Czech Republic, Estonia and Lithuania have subsequently graduated from further GEF support).

¹⁸ Burundi, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Guyana, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Russia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Suriname, Swaziland, Vanuatu

¹⁹ along with 8 more non-CPB Party countries (Guyana, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine Authority, Suriname, Vanuatu) currently not-eligible for GEF support for biosafety

(iv) Socio-economic considerations.

UNEP has discussed the feasibility of using an issue-specific approach in a select group of pilot countries for each of these topics. UNEP is currently collaborating with the SCBD to conduct a survey and convene an expert panel meeting on national experiences with socio-economic considerations in decision-making on LMOs²⁰.

4. The Way Forward in 2008:

GEF support for capacity building in biosafety has been slowed by the transition to the RAF. In order to provide a comprehensive portfolio for the delivery of biosafety support during GEF-4, it is important that the Program Document being developed jointly by GEF SEC, UNEP and other Agencies is presented in time for the April 2008 Council meeting. A roadmap for this process has been developed by UNEP and the GEF Secretariat.

This program document will reflect guidance already provided in Strategic Program 6: “Building Capacity for the Implementation of the Cartagena Protocol” of the Biodiversity Focal Area Strategy approved by Council in June 2007, as well as the need to address Monitoring & Evaluation mechanisms, in accordance with the Results-Based Management Framework for the GEF. It will also take into consideration the recommendations of the Independent Evaluation of GEF Support to Biosafety ([GEF/ME/C.28/Inf.1](#)) and lessons learnt through prior projects (see Annex 1 below).

The Program Document will be submitted to the April 2008 Council Meeting along with the first tranche of PIFs for individual biosafety projects to allow GEF support for biosafety capacity building to match demand during GEF-4.

²⁰ This activity is funded by the UK DfID

Annex 1: Guidance towards implementation of National Biosafety Frameworks: Lessons learned from the UNEP demonstration projects

The UNEP-GEF Biosafety Unit recently analyzed lessons learned from the 8 UNEP-managed demonstration projects for implementation of National Biosafety Frameworks. These projects were approved by GEF Council in November 2001, for Bulgaria, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Kenya, Namibia, Poland, and Uganda. The 3-year projects started in September 2002 and were completed in the period 2005-2007. The report will be posted on the UNEP Biosafety website in early 2008

The report provides a synthesis and analysis of lessons learned from the 8 implementation projects. The findings and recommendations offer valuable lessons to countries moving towards the implementation of the Cartagena Protocol for Biosafety, through similar projects. In e 2006, the GEF Council approved another round of 11 UNEP-managed biosafety implementation projects for countries in Africa, Asia and Central/Eastern Europe.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations to enhance project achievements:

1. The agreed project duration turned out to be too short for most countries. As a result, the expected duration of the present set of implementation projects is now 4 years instead of 3.
2. A national biosafety policy or strategy is essential to provide guiding principles for the subsequent development and implementation of a biosafety legal framework.
3. In the development of policies, laws and regulations, the process carried out is equally as important as the resulting policy or legal document. Consultative approaches are indispensable even though this may imply time-consuming rounds of review and revisions.
4. Devising a strategy for getting a policy or legal document through, and investing in raising awareness and familiarity among policy makers of biosafety needs, may reduce the time required to take the desired instrument from draft to adoption. The National Coordination Committee (NCC) can play a valuable role in this process.
5. External review of draft policies and laws contributed to their practicality and consistency with the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.
6. Detailed implementing regulations (decrees, technical norms, administrative resolutions, etc) are an equally essential element of a biosafety framework, as they clarify matters over which agency (-ies) regulate what, and how.
7. Technical guidelines for reviewing and assessing notifications were introduced through targeted training programs, which often benefited from involvement of foreign experts.
8. Recurrent technical training on topics such as risk assessment, GMO detection, and others, was consistently identified as a priority for future support, and frequently mentioned as a candidate for cross-country (sub-regional) collaboration. The sharing of expertise and information was done on an informal basis; this should become a more regular feature in future support programs.
9. A complete inventory should be developed of technical outputs from the implementation projects, in order to make them accessible to other countries. In some cases, this would include support for translations.
10. It will be essential that GMO detection laboratories, established with UNEP-GEF support, seek international accreditation so that they can act as reference laboratories in the sub-region.

11. Establishing a national program or strategy for public awareness should be considered, in order to best reach out to different stakeholder groups, and to avoid unintended effects such as unnecessary public controversy.

12. Inclusion of a wide range of stakeholder representatives in the NCC proved an effective approach to public involvement in biosafety framework development, review, and adoption.

13. Progress on establishing national BCHs and contributing to the central BCH was very uneven across countries, and sometimes hampered by national laws governing the distribution of official government documents. This issue must be addressed upfront in future and current implementation projects as well as current BCH support projects (see BCH lessons learned below)

Recommendations to enhance project management:

1. A potentially valuable guidance document to implementation project teams at the national level is the draft UNEP “Guide for implementation of national biosafety frameworks”, which should be made available in its final version to all participating countries.

2. Stocktaking workshops at project inception are an important tool to review the project’s objectives and proposed activities, and to identify any necessary adjustments early on.

3. The coordination function for implementation project requires substantial investments in terms of staff time. The projects require an NPC who acts as an “ambassador” towards policy makers, stakeholder groups, etc. A skilled and experienced assistant NPC can help ensure continuity in times of staff turnover.

4. Finance managers should be considered as full members of the project teams. Legal experts should be involved early on in projects emphasizing the development and approval of laws and regulations.

5. NCCs play an important role in guiding the project team and also in the formulation and adoption of policies and laws. They are also instrumental in promoting coordination among government agencies. This function should be spelled out in their terms of reference.

6. Collaboration across countries should be encouraged, as a regular feature of biosafety implementation projects. Areas for collaboration must be carefully determined but would include, as an initial step, joint work on technical guidelines and technical training.

7. Collating and providing access to (translated) materials developed under the implementation projects would encourage cross-country collaboration.

8. Project teams benefited from interaction with foreign experts. Though external technical support can be a sensitive issue in country-driven projects, exchange of information, know-how and experiences should be encouraged.

9. Project teams should identify areas for external technical support early on the project; for example, by conducting a training needs assessment.

10. UNEP should compile a roster of experts in various biosafety disciplines who can support implementation projects in specific areas. It will be important to establish clear criteria and a peer-review process for this purpose.

11. Technical support by the UNEP biosafety team was well received, but demand clearly exceeded supply. UNEP should seek formal collaboration with specialized agencies in order to better address technical assistance needs.

Emerging Lessons: *Building Capacity for Effective Participation in the Biosafety Clearing-House (BCH)*

Country (ies): Global (139 countries)

Cost of Project: Approx. USD15M (USD13.8 GEF) excluding co-financing from countries.

Description of Project: The GEF provided funds to build country capacity both to develop national BCH components and to access and use the resources available through the global BCH. Among the project objectives is familiarizing decision-makers, stakeholders and others with their obligations as a Party to the Cartagena Protocol so they can input the required information and ensure it is available through the Biosafety Clearing-House to other potential users. Another aspect of the project includes selecting, training and maintaining a regional base of the BCH Advisors. A peer reviewed training course has been developed and is available through www.unep.ch/biosafety. The project uses a combination of UNEP staff and Regional Advisors to conduct country-level work including assistance on decisions regarding country participation in the BCH, training and other activities. As of 31st November 2006, 106 countries are participating in this global project.

Summary of Emerging Lessons

1. A decision was made early in project development that countries would not be able to access funding for a National Project Coordinator (NPC) through project funds. The BCH function was seen as a function of a government-employed or -nominated person and not a function carried out outside normal business practices of a country. It was also seen as only 20% of a person's yearly task. However, once countries see the logic of the reason they do go ahead and participate in the project. This lack of NPC or of paid consultant at a national level has led to a slow start, but may ultimately contribute to sustainability as countries realize that BCH is integral to being compliant as a Party.
2. Linked to the above-point, once countries realize that the BCH is a national-function, one they have signed on to by being Parties to the Protocol, they have provided higher than expected co-financing, sometimes to the level of 80% and in one case to the level of 150%.
3. The BCH Project's initial step of training 40+ specialists, living and working in developing and economies-in-transition countries, quickly proved to be an important step. Individuals with expertise in either the Cartagena Protocol or information technology received training in the Biosafety Clearing-House, biosafety issues and now provide targeted and region-specific guidance and assistance to countries. This has helped countries participating in the project to receive advice from people facing similar situations.
4. Using Regional Advisors is proving to be an important aspect of the project, since cultural, linguistic, and regional differences are less likely to be barriers. The Advisors provide professional and consistent guidance, and the information countries are posting to the Biosafety Clearing-House is increasing in both volume and consistency. Regional Advisors are appreciated and in great demand by the countries.
5. Using an adult-learning approach in developing the training material has led to its easier delivery both to RAs and by RAs in-countries. The training of the RAs was a mixture of pedagogy, substance and UN values. This made it more fun for the RAs to learn as they were upgrading their own skills while learning the substance of what they have to deliver at a country-level. This has also led to a consistency in approach at a country-level. All national workshops are conducted in a consistent manner, taking into account the local culture and society.
6. The development of peer-reviewed training material has led to a higher-level acceptance of the workshops and training conducted using these materials. This has additionally also led to support for the training by different stakeholders and donor governments.

