



# CARIBBEAN SUB-REGION BIOSAFETY COMMUNICATION STRATEGY



## FINAL DOCUMENT

### BACKGROUND

The development of a Caribbean sub-Region Biosafety Communication Strategy was carried out under the auspices of the current UNEP-GEF-funded “Regional Project for Implementing National Biosafety Frameworks in the Caribbean sub-Region” which comprises the following 10 project countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

All project countries are Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB; <https://bch.cbd.int/protocol>), an international treaty which aims to “ensure the safe handling, transport and use of living modified organisms (LMOs<sup>1</sup>) resulting from modern biotechnology that may have adverse effects on biological diversity, taking also into account risks to human health , and specifically focusing on transboundary movements”.

The overall goal of the project is to implement effective, operable, transparent and sustainable National Biosafety Frameworks (NBFs) which cater for national and regional needs, deliver global benefits and are compliant with the CPB in the Caribbean sub-region to ensure that their biodiversity will be less vulnerable to any potential risks from introduced GMOs. To this end, the project encompasses five components that support: the development of national biosafety legislation and NBFs, institutional capacity building and human resource development, biosafety information management systems, and the articulation of regional cooperation frameworks.

Although not all project countries concur on the magnitude and consequences of the potential issues raised by modern biotechnology, all agree on the relevance of having biosafety regulatory systems in place. Having the necessary safeguards and controlling the entry and release of GMOs are essential to their safe use. Maintaining adequate biosafety levels and defining how to handle first-time imports and transit cases is of common interest to all Caribbean states. In doing so, there is no *a priori* need to have a policy position with respect to the acceptability or otherwise of GMOs.

This communication strategy is expected to raise the profile of the outcomes of the project, the scope of the CPB, and to guide the sub-Region to set in place a system to promote public awareness, communication and participation regarding GMOs and their regulation. It recommends and prioritises specific activities to be taken to raise awareness, promote communication and build partnerships. In this regard, it is meant to address the limited awareness, understanding and collaboration on communication activities of the importance of biosafety.

This communication strategy has been developed as a template to modify and build upon at the national level. Project countries are encouraged to share their final communication strategy with one another, and with primary target groups.

### COMMUNICATION ANALYSIS

A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis based on, albeit dated, biosafety awareness surveys undertaken in the sub-region has helped to understand the recent situation in terms of knowledge, opinions, attitudes and behaviour amongst target groups, as well as the key activities to be taken under the communication strategy. A few of the general key issues include:

<sup>1</sup> Organisms variously referred to as “genetically engineered”, “genetically manipulated”, “genetically modified”, and “transgenic”.

## STRENGTHS

- A one-stop-shop project biosafety website is under development and is expected to be operational before the close of the project,
- National government officials and representatives have experience in participating in meetings, workshops and discussion groups and networks,
- A roster of experts, for consultation by the NCAs and regulatory technical committees, is also under development and is expected to support the information exchange process.

## WEAKNESSES

- There is insufficient awareness and understanding of biosafety issues amongst targeted audiences and partners,
- There is limited and/or lack of capacity in the personnel given responsibility for biosafety matters in the National governments, including human, financial and technical resources,
- There is a lack of consistent, accurate and simplified messages for diverse audiences.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- The National governments and organisations could support efforts towards raising awareness and communicating with the general public,
- The general public has access to the Internet, print, TV and/or radio,
- Libraries and informational educational centres are used by the general public,
- Biodiversity issues are becoming increasingly more important. Biosafety can possibly be mainstreamed into biodiversity-related initiatives. In this regard, target groups will understand the issues regarding the CPB.

## THREATS

- There has been minimal activity on outreach/communication on biosafety issues by National governments and organisations.
- There are limited human and financial resources available for undertaking public awareness campaigns.

## GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The overall **goal** of the communication plan is:

- To promote a system in place to support awareness, communication and public participation regarding GMOs and their regulation.

The **objectives** of the communication plan are as follows:

- **Specific Objective 1** - To increase visibility of biosafety issues amongst target groups,
- **Specific Objective 2** - To facilitate greater understanding of biosafety issues that enables an increase of informed target groups,
- **Specific Objective 3** - To engage partnerships to actively participate in raising awareness of biosafety issues to improve collaborative initiatives.

## THE TARGET GROUPS AND PARTNERS

To meet the goals and objectives of the communication plan, it is necessary to determine the primary, secondary and tertiary target groups. These groups have been determined according to their importance. In addition, the target groups were determined in accordance with a review of the SWOT analysis regarding possible target groups

that may contribute to the strengths and opportunities and those that could resolve the weaknesses and threats. The key target groups are as follows:

#### PRIMARY (E.G. DECISION-MAKERS AND POLITICIANS)

- National and local government (e.g. national focal points, national competent authorities [NCAs], ministers, policy-makers, judiciary personnel, parliamentarians, governors and mayors).

#### SECONDARY (E.G. TECHNICAL STAFF OF COMPETENT AUTHORITIES)

- Technical representatives of national and local government (e.g. advisory committees, customs officers, programme officers, press officers),
- The roster of experts that is currently under development by the Regional Project, which may/may not comprise the same afore-mentioned representatives,
- International and/or regional organisations and agreements,
- The scientific community.

#### TERTIARY (E.G. THE GENERAL PUBLIC)

- National and local organisations and initiatives (e.g. non-governmental organisations, business community and/or community groups, such as community action groups, farmer associations, traditional/local leaders, women associations and youth groups),
- Mass media (e.g. Internet, print, radio and/or television),
- Academia (e.g. members of university and school boards, rectors and principals, lecturers and teachers),
- The general public.

The different groups can act as partners in implementing the activities of the communication strategy and communicating the key messages. The groups can also act as target groups to whom the activity is meant to make an impact. In the first instance, the focus of the communication strategy will be to provide informative materials to the primary target group. This group is of paramount importance because it will be its members who set the guidelines for the operation of biosafety activities in their respective countries, and will be critically involved in the support of any future biosafety intervention. They will also be the group which will have to analyse the new draft bills and biosafety policies that are currently being produced or revised; activities that will form the basis of all subsequent regulatory and communication activities. The focus will then move to the remaining target groups in a co-ordinated manner such that each group is sufficiently trained (secondary group) and informed (tertiary group) for their respective role in GMO regulation and use.

## COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Communication channels are means to raise awareness to different target groups. The key channels are as follows:

- **Promotional materials** - posters, banners, statements, videos, information kiosks/displays, billboards,
- **Publications** - brochures, newsletters, booklets, annual reports, press materials, training materials, educational materials, CD-ROMs, USB keys and letters,
- **Websites** – the virtual Regional Centre of Excellence, the project website, the national CPB websites, national Biosafety Clearing-House websites, social media sites (e.g. Facebook), discussion groups/fora, networks and mailing lists,
- **Annual, monthly and weekly events** - meetings, workshops, seminars/roundtables, side events and fairs, international/national celebrations, community events and festivals,
- **Mass media tools** – Internet blogs, television talk shows/programmes, radio talk shows/programmes, newspapers, magazines, journals and public announcements,
- **Telephone communication** - SMS and voicemail messages, and
- **Partner locations and centres** - government offices, laboratories, customs offices, shopping malls, libraries, schools, supermarkets, press offices and media houses.

In using these communication channels, the Project/target groups will be able to convey key messages.

A virtual one-stop regional centre of excellence in biosafety has recently been created, and it is expected to serve as a platform to help implement this Communication Strategy through providing: information exchange opportunities via a project-supported website; access to a roster of biosafety experts to respond to requests for technical advice; information on how to access the biosafety training programme for the region, and; downloadable biosafety information materials, etc. The production of the first key materials to be used for this strategy is underway and will complement similar efforts at the national level. These latter efforts will be essential to the future of the communication process.

## THE KEY MESSAGES

The project is developing consistent, accurate and simplified messages. The messages serve as a “corporate identity” for target groups to understand and to improve recognition of the importance of biosafety communication.

Everyone needs to work together to ensure that any use of GMOs in the sub-region is well and appropriately regulated, and that the safety of GMO imports and exports is equivalent to those of non-GMOs, to ensure a prosperous future. Some of the key messages are as follows: -

- Biosafety policy is being developed by the project for eventual submission to relevant policy-makers and authorities in the sub-region,
- The project is assisting Governments in the sub-region to enhance their biosafety regulatory capacity, commencing with
  - the training of NCA personnel in technical biosafety matters and risk assessment, and
  - increasing their ability to prioritise, mainstream and communicate biosafety issues,
- Support informative materials are being developed and will be made available via a one-stop-shop regional project biosafety website,
- Scientists and academia need to become involved in GMO regulation and communication, and to share scientific information and educational tools,
- Organisations need to actively build networks and capacity to guide and share information with all of us, and
- Media can play a major role in raising awareness of biosafety issues and of the role of the general public in GMO consultation and regulation.