

Media Workshop on Communicating Science and Biosafety

21st & 22nd April, 2015

Mumbai

A Brief Overview

Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), New Delhi, a premier institution in mass communication education, training and research in collaboration with Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MOEFCC), Govt of India, Global Environment Facility (GEF) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has conducted a series of media workshops on 'Communicating Science and Biosafety' across the country. The workshops are a part of a project, 'Capacity Building Project on Biosafety (Phase II)' undertaken by MOEFCC that aims at strengthening the biosafety management system in India to ensure adequate protection of human health and biodiversity from potential risks arising from all LMO-related activities in agriculture. The 2nd workshop of the series was held at Seminar Hall, Department of Communication & Journalism, Health Centre Building, University of Mumbai, Vidya Nagri Campus on 21st & 22nd April 2015.

The Mumbai National Workshop brought together participants from diverse media units viz. AIR, PTI, PIB, Loksatta, Hindustan Times, Prahaar, Sakal, Lokmat, DD News to name a few. Community Radio representative from Must Radio 107.8 FM also attended the workshop.

To provide a holistic perspective on a wide range of topics related to biosafety in agri-biotechnology and its communication, learned speakers and research scientists actively involved in the field of plant/crop plant-biotechnology and associated organizations/institutes like NISCOM, School of Life Sciences-JNU, Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change were invited to address the issue.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WORKSHOP

Day 1 – 21st April, 2015 Tuesday

Introduction and Technical Session I: Innovations in Biotechnology and Importance of the Bio-

safety Programme The workshop started with a welcome note by Dr Sunder Rajdeep, Head, Department of Communication and Journalism, University of Mumbai and subsequently advanced through an orientation by Dr Ranjini Warriar, Director, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India and formal inauguration of the workshop by Shri Naresh Chandra, Hon'ble Pro Vice Chancellor of University of Mumbai. Professor Gita Bamezai, Head, Department of Communication Research, IIMC, New Delhi gave a brief



overview on project aim, objectives, and anticipated outcomes of this novel initiative. The succeeding technical session described the history & growth of bio-technology across the world and bio-safety issues related to agricultural bio-technology. It familiarized the participants with some of the important innovations that have taken place in the field of biotechnology. The session broadly discussed about the process of production of Genetically Modified food and cleared some of the misconceptions regarding GM crops.

Technical Session II: Biosafety Regulatory Framework in India This session gave a brief account of



Biosafety Regulatory Framework in India and Global regulatory regime with a special focus on Biosafety. It started with an expansive discussion on Environmental Protection laws in Indian Constitution and subsequently emphasized on the developments of Biosafety regulations and legislations relevant to biosafety. Further the session explained the roles and responsibilities of various ministries and departments and outlined the guidelines and policy frameworks incorporating biosafety in India. It also described the status of GM crops approved so far in India and explained concisely about the basic objective of conducting biosafety workshops.

Technical Session III: Practice of Science Journalism in India - Challenges & Opportunities The next session was a Brain-Storming session with workshop participants. It invited participants to deliberate on level of science reporting in Indian media, constraints and opportunities in reporting scientific issues, how to report agro-biotechnological issues/innovations. The participants shared their experience and highlighted numerous problems and challenges of reporting science in present context.

Technical Session IV: Opportunities & Challenges for Media Professional in Reporting Innovations in Science In the fourth technical session, a recorded skype presentation by Ms. Helen Briggs, BBC Science/Health Correspondent, England was played. The topic of the presentation was “Opportunities & Challenges for Media Professional in Reporting Innovations in Science” in which she highlighted the vital role of public broadcaster in communicating scientific issues and shared her experience on various practical challenges/lessons learnt from the field while dealing with GM related information in British Media.

Day 2 – 22th April, 2015 Wednesday

Technical Session I: Biosafety Issues & Media - Dimensions of Risk Communication This session extensively discussed about the gaps and challenges for building capacities of mass media in reporting science and bio-safety issues in India. Citing numerous positive and negative reflections on GM crops, it urged media to report these issues intelligently and in a sensible manner. It brought attention to the fact that Risks are vastly affected by socially constructed norms, practices and technical decisions to use, or not use and thus success of biotech products are located within social settings. Hence it adjured media to act in a responsible way to generate pragmatic knowledge, attitudes, and perception on such issues in society.



Technical Session II: Communication of Scientific Innovations This session talked about new fields and innovations in Biology. It highlighted the challenges and opportunities in communication of Biological research especially in the area of GM research and the need of educating the society to prevent raising of undue fears. It finally touched upon realistic hopes and time frame of realization, allaying apprehensions, superhuman or Frankenstein, using all media, Print, Electronic & Interactive, scientists and science communicators to forge a joint front.

Technical Session III: Biosafety Clearing House (BCH) and Information Sources/Databases on Biosafety Issues The final session of the workshop was designed to provide adequate information regarding the web portals, links and databases (both online and offline) responsible for the dissemination of the facts, figures and updates in the field of agri-biotechnology, biosafety and science communication. This session delineated details related to Biosafety Clearing House and numerous other reliable sources of GMOs/LMOs and Biosafety for credible and authentic reporting.

Valedictory session

Two days workshops culminated with certificate distribution to participants by Dr. G.P. Phondke, Former Director of NISCOM, New Delhi. Feedback/suggestions were invited from the participants through a structured questionnaire for the performance evaluation and nurturing further improvements in succeeding workshops to be conducted in near future as part of this series. It is expected that the feedback and suggestions from the workshops would enrich the national discourse on biosafety at various levels and would contribute in effective policy making in the field of agribiotechnology.

This workshop provided an excellent forum for extensive discussion on biosafety issues involving participants and experts from assorted fields. At the end of the session, Workshop participants acknowledged that this endeavour by IIMC enhanced their knowledge about GMOs/LMOs and biosafety to a great extent.



Certificate distribution to participants

