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Substantive issues: genetically modified organisms

Report on the second joint round table on public awareness, access to information and public participation regarding living modified organisms/genetically modified organisms

**Prepared by the secretariats to the Convention on Access to Information,
Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in
Environmental Matters and the Convention on Biological Diversity***

Summary

The second joint round table on public awareness, access to information and public participation regarding living modified organisms/genetically modified organisms was organized in Geneva from 15 to 17 November 2016 under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The joint round table was organized pursuant to decisions II/1 and V/6 of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and decisions BS-II/6, BS-II/13 and BS-VII/6 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. These decisions call, inter alia, for

* This document was submitted late owing to additional time required for the secretariats to liaise with speakers on their presentations and interventions and for the finalization of the report.

work to be undertaken with regard to genetically modified organisms and for cooperation between the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, with a view to maximizing synergies and avoiding duplication of efforts.

The present report presents the proceedings and conclusions of the joint round table as summarized by the Chair, including the key challenges, good practices and lessons learned with regard to accession to and implementation of the relevant provisions of the two treaties.

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction	3
A. Attendance	3
B. Proceedings	3
II. Sharing knowledge, good practices and lessons learned	5
A. Ratification and implementation of the amendment to the Convention on genetically modified organisms and status of implementation of article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety	5
B. Access to information	6
C. Awareness-raising and education	6
D. Public participation	7
E. Mechanisms for cooperation	8
F. Outcomes from the discussions	9
III. The way forward: Chair's summary	11

I. Introduction

1. The secretariats of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and the Convention on Biological Diversity organized a second round table on public awareness, access to information and public participation regarding living modified organisms/genetically modified organisms from 15 to 17 November 2016 in Geneva, Switzerland.¹ The event was organized under the leadership of the Government of Austria.

2. The aim of the round table was to build countries' capacities in raising awareness and promoting access to information and public participation regarding living modified organisms/genetically modified organisms (LMOs/GMOs) through sharing knowledge, good practices and lessons learned, and to make recommendations for future action at the national, regional and international level in that regard.

A. Attendance

3. Delegations from the following Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety attended the round table: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Latvia, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and United States of America. The meeting was also attended by delegations from Guatemala, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Namibia, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, South Africa and Tunisia.

4. In addition, the following non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participated: Centre for International Environmental Law (Switzerland); EcoNexus (Netherlands); Eco-TIRAS International Environmental Association of River Keepers (Republic of Moldova); Environmental Public Advocacy Center/Environmental Law Resource Center (Armenia); European ECO Forum; "Greenwomen" Analytical Environmental Agency (Kazakhstan); Naurzum Bionet (Kazakhstan); Southeast Asia Regional Initiatives For Community Empowerment (Philippines); and Tunisian Association for Biosafety and Environmental Education (Tunisia).

5. Representatives from the following academic and research institutes also attended the round table: Agricultural Biotechnology Research Institute of Iran; Aleksandër Moisiu University of Durrës (Albania); and Institute of Genetics and Cytology of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus.

6. Furthermore, representatives of the following Aarhus Centres participated: Aarhus Centre of Belarus (Belarus); Aarhus Centre of Turkmenistan (Turkmenistan); Aarhus Centre of Ukraine (Ukraine); and Vanadzor Aarhus Centre (Armenia).

B. Proceedings

7. The Chair of the round table, Mr. Helmut Gaugitsch (Austria), opened the meeting. The Director of the ECE Environment Division and an Associate Information Officer of the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, acting on behalf of the Executive Secretary of the Convention, delivered welcoming addresses.

¹ Documents, presentations and other information and material concerning the round table are available from: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42179#/>.

8. The round table was divided into thematic sessions covering the principles enshrined in the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (namely, access to information, public participation, and awareness-raising and education) and a special networking session where participants were invited to hold follow-up bilateral discussions regarding the selected priority topics in order to lay down the foundations for possible future cooperation. During the thematic sessions, Governments and representatives of international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector and academia made presentations and shared knowledge, good practices and lessons learned. The sessions also included a period of discussion in which participants made interventions and posed questions to panellists, who were invited to speak owing to their expertise in the various thematic areas. The areas covered by the presentations and subsequent discussions included: (a) ratification and implementation of the Aarhus Convention's amendment on public participation in decisions on the deliberate release into the environment and placing on the market of genetically modified organisms (GMO amendment) and the status of implementation of article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety; (b) access to information; (c) awareness-raising and education; (d) public participation; and (e) mechanisms for cooperation. Participants also took stock of successes and challenges, and identified synergies in relation to the promotion of the ratification and effective implementation of the GMO amendment, the Guidelines on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice with respect to Genetically Modified Organisms (Lucca Guidelines) (MP.PP/2003/3-KIEV.CONF/2003/INF/7)² to the Aarhus Convention, and article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. Participants also identified the priority areas for furthering public awareness, education, access to information and public participation in relation to LMOs/GMOs that would allow for the development of concrete national, regional and international activities.

9. On the second day, there was a special session dedicated to networking and bilateral discussions during which participants were invited to exchange views in thematic groups and to hold follow-up bilateral discussions regarding selected priority topics in order to lay the foundation for possible future cooperation. Participants discussed the following: (a) tools and mechanisms that would help to improve communication with a wider audience and strengthen biosafety education; (b) procedures and mechanisms for ensuring effective access to information and public participation; and (c) key challenges related to legislative frameworks and institutional arrangements and means that could help to improve them.

10. On the third day, the representative of Germany, who acted as rapporteur for the thematic sessions, summarized the key points from the discussions under each of the sessions. The main points are incorporated in the sections below, as appropriate.

11. A summary of the outcomes of the event was presented by the Chair at the end of the round table.

12. In addition, prior to the round table, surveys had been sent to the focal points of Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to ascertain the status of implementation of the provisions on transparency and public participation regarding LMOs/GMOs under the two treaties and to identify potential needs, challenges and priorities. The surveys also aimed to measure the benefits of access to information on LMOs/GMOs and opportunities to participate in decision-making on the deliberate release and placing on the market of LMOs/GMOs. A preliminary analysis of the survey results was shared with participants at the round table.

² Available from: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42179#/> ("background documents" tab)

II. Sharing knowledge, good practices and lessons learned

A. Ratification and implementation of the amendment to the Convention on genetically modified organisms and status of implementation of article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

13. A representative of the Aarhus Convention secretariat provided an overview of the status of ratification and implementation of the GMO amendment, drawing on the national implementation reports submitted by the Parties during the previous reporting cycle. In addition, a preliminary analysis of the main needs, challenges and priorities regarding the implementation of the GMO amendment and article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety were described based on a survey that had been circulated to the focal points of the two treaties prior to the round table.

14. A representative of the Convention on Biological Diversity secretariat gave an overview of the status of implementation of article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the programme of work on public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms (programme of work) adopted to facilitate the implementation of article 23. The overview was based on the following sources: the results of the third national reports submitted by the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in 2015; a dedicated survey to review progress made in the implementation of the programme of work by Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety; and the Convention on Biological Diversity secretariat's collaborative activities with the Aarhus Convention, including among other things, e-learning modules, online discussions, workshops, a checklist of key measures for ratification and implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in the context of LMOs/GMOs and a summary of tools and resources to support implementation of the two instruments.³ The representative highlighted key recommendations based on the survey results. She also reported that, at its eighth meeting, to be held in Cancun, Mexico, from 4 to 17 December 2016, the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety would decide if the programme of work should be extended and if the Parties should adopt priority areas or activities. She also noted regional and international opportunities for cooperation and engagement.

15. The representative of Georgia reported on the recent ratification of the GMO amendment and the legislative measures taken to implement the amendment in Georgia. A number of benefits had emerged from the development of relevant national legislation, including improved regulation, monitoring and control, reduction of adverse effects and improvements to human health and opportunities for scientific research. Key challenges included the lack of awareness on LMOs/GMOs and the need for multilateral cooperation to exchange good practices and experiences between Parties. It was important to ratify the GMO amendment, as the main instrument for international cooperation, to address the issue effectively.

16. The representative of Guatemala made a presentation on the measures undertaken by the country to implement article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the related programme of work. A variety of measures had been taken to strengthen capacity, promote public awareness and education and facilitate public participation and access to information. Associated challenges included major biological and cultural diversity and a lack of capacity to implement article 23 of the Protocol. There was a need for joint initiatives, training

³ Available from: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42179#/> (tab background documents)

activities, biosafety education, procedures for access to information and programmes for gender equality to further promote public participation as future priority areas or activities.

B. Access to information

17. The representative of the Philippines presented legislative frameworks and institutional arrangements to facilitate access to biosafety information in the Philippines as part of implementing programme element 3 of the programme of work. There were initiatives to actively disseminate information on websites, through e-mails, national events and commissions. Among lessons learned was the need for full government support to operationalize the national biosafety framework, the importance of basing decisions on the best available science and the value of access to information. To address gaps from lessons learned, a number of crucial steps had to be taken to support national procedures, including: enhancing regional networks and capacities, such as the new Asia Biosafety Clearing House Family, to implement a 2015–2020 Asia Biosafety Clearing House Road Map; institutionalizing the national biosafety regulatory system; strengthening regular dialogues among regulatory agencies; ensuring that the information in the Biosafety Clearing-House was accurate and up to date; and promoting access of information to a broader public.

18. A representative of the NGO EcoNexus offered a civil society perspective on access to information regarding LMOs/GMOs. The representative noted that improved institutional arrangements (e.g., help desks, request forms, harmonized time frames and common standards for providing or denying biosafety information) could be most instrumental in making information easily accessible, pointing also to the requirements of the Aarhus Convention in that regard. The lack of entry into force of the Convention's GMO amendment, in conjunction with the Convention on Biological Diversity compliance committee having no mandate to consider cases brought forward by NGOs and the limited dissemination of information regarding LMOs/GMOs, remained the central practical problems. Among key challenges in the area were products from modern biotechnology, such as synthetic biology and new breeding technologies.

19. The representative of Serbia shared good practice on and challenges to effective access to information regarding LMOs and GMOs. The representative reported on the national legislative and institutional framework regarding LMOs/GMOs, including the role of the Agency of Environmental Protection in providing access to information and maintaining a meta-register on environmental information in Serbia. The country had also organized public hearings and panels on the potential impact of GMOs on human health and the environment. There was, however, a need for coordination and cooperation between different governmental institutions.

C. Awareness-raising and education

20. The representative of Tunisia presented the country's efforts to raise public awareness and promote public education on biosafety issues, based on programme elements 1 and 2 of the programme of work under the Cartagena Protocol on Biodiversity. He noted, among other things, the many capacity-building efforts, the strong participation of the technical institutions in the process and the various institutional measures undertaken, including: developing a communication and public awareness subcommittee to implement a communication plan; establishing joint educational initiatives, such as the NGO, Tunisian Association for Biosafety and Environmental Education; increasing the production of guidelines; making use of international events, such as the International Day for Biodiversity on 22 May of each year, to organize a biosafety week to raise awareness; and providing information material on LMOs/GMOs to the general public. However, challenges remained,

in particular related to institutions, financial and technical resources, and putting in place legal frameworks. Other challenges included mainstreaming biosafety into other agendas and establishing strong partnerships with NGOs.

21. The representative of Namibia shared the measures undertaken by Namibia to promote effective public awareness, participation and education regarding LMOs as part of programme element 2 (public awareness and education) of the programme of work. Namibia had conducted a public awareness baseline survey, which had demonstrated the need for a public awareness strategy. A public awareness strategy had subsequently been developed by the National Commission on Research Science and Technology to address target groups from many sectors, including policymakers, educational institutions, the media, farmers and the public. Based on the strategy, biosafety had been incorporated in university curricula in the chemistry and biochemistry departments, a training-of-trainers programme had been established for university staff, awareness-raising campaigns had been launched, a roadshow and national information workshops had been held and the national Biosafety Clearing House had been developed. Nonetheless, certain challenges remained in communicating biosafety to a wider audience. In particular, there were limited data connectivity for marginalized communities and difficulties in translating scientific and technical information into local languages. To address those challenges at the national level, awareness-raising meetings on the Biosafety Act and biosafety regulations with ministries and institutions should continue, as that would assist the country to implement article 23.

D. Public participation

22. A session on public participation included a presentation by a representative of European ECO Forum of a model example of public participation in relation to LMO/GMO decision-making based on the Maastricht Recommendations on Promoting Effective Public Participation in Decision-making in Environmental Matters (Maastricht Recommendations).⁴ He noted that due consideration had to be given to identifying whom to notify regarding the decision-making procedure and what information should be included in the notification (e.g., the opportunities for the public to participate and the time frames regarding those opportunities, details on the activity, the venue of any public hearing, the means of access to all relevant information and the responsible public authority) and to ensuring that the notification was adequate, timely and effective. Public participation had to take place as early as possible, when all options were open, meaning that it should take place when any option could still be chosen as the preferred option (including the possibility to reject a proposed activity, i.e., the zero option). In addition, sufficient time had to be provided for the public to effectively voice their concerns. In such a model example, access to information was necessary to facilitate adequate public participation. Moreover, the outcome of the public hearing or any other means of public participation should be duly taken into account in the final decision.

23. The representative of Finland presented good practices and challenges with regard to promoting public participation in the country. In Finland, field trials were announced in the official journal, on the website of the competent authority and sometimes in printed media by those carrying out the trials. The public had the possibility to submit comments, which

⁴ ECE/MP.PP/2014/2/Add.2. The Maastricht Recommendations are a practical tool to improve the implementation of the Aarhus Convention's provisions on public participation in decision-making by assisting Parties and public officials when designing legal frameworks and carrying out public participation procedures on environmental decision-making under the Convention. They may also be of value as reference and guidance material to interested members of the public including, NGOs and the private sector. The Maastricht Recommendations are available as a United Nations Sales publication (Sales No.: E.15.II.E.7.2) from <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=41803&L=0>.

were then considered during the decision-making. On several occasions, public hearings had been organized with the possibility to visit the area. The representative further emphasized the role of the Advisory Board on Biotechnology nominated by the Government, which was responsible for informing and educating the public.

24. A representative of Eco-TIRAS shared a set of good practices and tools for engaging NGOs in the decision-making processes regarding LMOs/GMOs, based on experiences gained in the Republic of Moldova. Websites, local press and media, posters in public buildings, public hearings, notices on the Internet and other methods were used to inform the public concerned. Lessons learned included the need to increase the interest and awareness of decision makers and public authorities on the subject, strengthen interministerial cooperation and information and data exchange and improve the cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organizations.

25. The representative of the Republic of Korea highlighted the country's efforts to facilitate public participation regarding LMOs based on programme element 4 of the programme of work on public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of LMOs. As a result of a lack of procedures to facilitate access to information on imports of LMOs and accurate information leading to unbiased opinion, in addition to limited public participation mechanisms to reflect public opinion in decisions, the Korea Biosafety Clearing House was used as a means to enhance public participation efforts. The Korea Biosafety Clearing House, among other things, organized public hearings, forums and other meetings. In doing so, it gathered public comments regarding the improvement of the existing legal frameworks that was shared in the media. With regard to the way forward, it was important to mobilize the public to participate in the decision-making process through NGOs participating in legislative processes. Biosafety Clearing House focal points had the possibility to help increase interministerial activities to enhance public participation. New initiatives supporting regional cooperation, such as the Asia Biosafety Clearing House Family, were also important.

E. Mechanisms for cooperation

26. A session on mechanisms for cooperation included presentations by a representative of the National Academy of Science of Belarus and a representative of the Aarhus Centre of Ukraine followed by a round-table discussion. The presenter from Belarus addressed mechanisms for national, regional and international cooperation and synergies to facilitate public awareness, education, participation and access to information regarding LMO/GMOs. Priority areas or activities in that regard included: improving national cooperation between the national coordination biosafety centre and the Aarhus Centre; organizing regular seminars for decision makers to prepare for further mainstreaming of biosafety into biodiversity programmes; encouraging public involvement in the decision-making process regarding LMOs; adapting and harmonizing legislative frameworks to the provisions of the Aarhus Convention, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and regional initiatives; and securing financial, technical and human resources to support implementation of the Protocol's programme of work and the Convention's GMO amendment. The representative recommended extending the programme of work, including adopting priority activities or areas, developing and strengthening advisory mechanisms and promoting enhanced cooperation at all levels, including assistance from international biosafety organizations to countries in need.

27. A representative of the Aarhus Centre of Ukraine presented the Centre's efforts to promote dialogue between the public and public authorities on GMO matters. Among other measures, the Aarhus Centre organized information and training seminars and developed educational programmes and textbooks, taking into account different educational needs for

different target groups. Challenges identified included the absence of a national register of GMO sources and products, a lack of coordination between State bodies and the spread of genetically modified agricultural crops owing to their illegal and uncontrolled cultivation.

F. Outcomes from the discussions

28. The discussion on ratification and implementation of the Aarhus Convention's GMO amendment and the status of implementation of article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety highlighted the following good practices, challenges and lessons learned:

(a) Many countries have developed national biosafety frameworks as an initial step in developing legal frameworks that include components on public awareness, education and participation; however, more efforts are needed to implement these frameworks to support the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. To implement the frameworks, several countries have developed effective procedures for access to information and public participation;

(b) Legal frameworks that protect the right to access information and provide criteria for confidential business information can act as good practice examples. The provisions of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (in particular article 21) could also act as guiding tools to determine which information should be confidential information;

(c) Governments have developed and should continue to develop guidelines in a number of areas, including for the educational sector and the media;

(d) It is important for the programme of work on public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of LMOs to be extended and for the GMO amendment to enter into force to more efficiently implement article 23;

(e) The Aarhus Convention's Lucca Guidelines and Maastricht Recommendations are useful guidance for putting in place access to information and public participation procedures.

29. The discussion on access to information highlighted the following good practices, challenges and lessons learned:

(a) Information regarding LMOs/GMOs should be accessible to and understandable by all members of the public, including farmers, local communities and children. In providing information, the public should have a common understanding of definitions of different GMOs/LMOs and plant breeding techniques;

(b) Advisory boards, such as expert committees or multi-stakeholder advisory boards, serve as platforms for facilitating public access to information that is of great value;

(c) Accurate and broadly shared information is largely contingent on the effectiveness of interministerial coordination;

(d) While general provisions on public access to information are enshrined in national constitutions, there are often discrepancies with and between environmental legislation, food safety and consumer rights legislation and general administrative procedures on access to GMO-related environmental information;

(e) There is a lack of balance among access to information, protection of confidential information and intellectual property rights;

(f) There is a need for closer cooperation between various stakeholders, such as researchers, to build consensus on the choice of research methodologies, identify objective information and, ultimately, provide accurate information that is available to the public. Such

cooperation facilitates a broader involvement of different stakeholders in discussing LMO/GMO-related matters;

(g) There is uncertainty with regard to the accuracy of the information provided regarding GMOs/LMOs that are deliberately released into the environment and GMOs/LMOs that are placed on the market. In this regard, providing accurate information in registers is important;

(h) Electronic tools, including online databases, are not easily accessible to everyone, especially in developing countries. In addition, owing to limited access to electronic tools, it is usually harder for rural communities to participate in decision-making regarding LMOs/GMOs than it is for urban populations. In this regard, there is a need to combine the use of traditional tools (e.g., newspapers, television and radio) with electronic tools (e.g., e-mail, social media and websites) and cooperate with relevant stakeholders to ensure broader access to information.

30. The discussion on awareness-raising and education highlighted the following good practices, challenges and lessons learned:

(a) Access to information, awareness-raising and education are intrinsically linked. The engagement of teachers in awareness-raising is essential in order to disseminate information. In general, educational institutions work to provide information through different curricula (e.g., science and environmental studies);

(b) Effective collaboration with different stakeholders can assist in overcoming the issue of limited financial, human and technical resources, including:

(i) Local, national and international networks and cooperation between public authorities and NGOs sharing costs and using existing staff to raise awareness and promote public education;

(ii) Commissions and associations, usually non-governmental, providing funds for awareness-raising and education concerning LMOs/GMOs;

(iii) Education and training for specific target groups in public authorities, such as policymakers, with a view to increasing the implementation of relevant decisions and laws;

(c) Training-of-trainers workshops for relevant stakeholders, such as local representatives of the public, including NGOs, should not be neglected, as education is a prerequisite for further information sharing and public participation in decision-making regarding LMOs/GMOs;

(d) A combination of available communication means (e.g., websites, e-learning tools, publications, guides, media and file hosting services) should be included in national strategies, action plans and awareness-raising campaigns. To ascertain the exact needs for certain means of communication and to enhance the engagement of target groups (e.g., politicians, policymakers, scientists, academics and members of the media), communication plans should be based on surveys;

(e) International celebrations, such as biodiversity days, are opportunities to carry out campaigns and raise public awareness on matters related to LMOs/GMOs;

(f) Public authorities handling applications for the deliberate release of LMOs/GMOs in the environment, including those providing relevant information to the public, have limited experience and resources. In this regard, there is a need for training and education of public authorities;

(g) There is noticeably more public awareness of biosafety issues in cities than in rural areas;

(h) High costs for translating relevant materials remain an important obstacle in raising public awareness concerning LMOs/GMOs;

(i) LMO/GMO-related issues need to be explained further by experts in a manner that is easy for the public to understand (e.g., using slogans or simple outreach materials);

(j) Promoting public awareness and education can improve understanding of issues with regard to the decision-making processes regarding LMOs/GMOs and the importance of public responsibilities. For example, making available notifications of potential imports of LMOs/GMOs and accurate information can enhance public interest in participating in the decision-making process regarding LMOs/GMOs and increase trust in final decisions regarding LMOs/GMOs;

(k) Innovative methods can enhance awareness of biosafety issues, such as biosafety staff members in government raising awareness in local communities, local communities and women promoting biosafety education and training of agriculture journalists in order for them to effectively host radio shows on biosafety issues.

31. The discussion on public participation highlighted the following good practices, challenges and lessons learned:

(a) Biased selection of stakeholders to participate in decision-making negatively affects decision-making related to LMOs/GMOs;

(b) There is insufficient participation of some stakeholders in the decision-making process related to LMOs/GMOs, including women and marginalized groups (e.g., indigenous peoples and local communities that are geographically isolated or have limited access to electronic resources), the private sector, farmers' unions and NGOs;

(c) Public authorities are often challenged by insufficient capacities and experience in carrying out public participation procedures related to risk assessment and risk management of LMOs/GMOs;

(d) Public inputs related to both opposing and promoting the application of an LMO/GMO should be considered in the decision-making process regarding LMOs/GMOs;

(e) Modern technology (e.g., social media and e-governance tools) can greatly facilitate the decision-making process regarding LMOs/GMOs, where feasible, by increasing the effectiveness of the public participation procedure in a way that supports transparency and accountability.

III. The way forward: Chair's summary

32. In a closing statement, the Chair summarized the key outcomes of the round table, including a set of proposals based on the discussions held during the different sessions.

33. The Chair observed that the round table called for concrete actions at the national level to:

(a) Strengthen coordination and cooperation between national focal points of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (through, e.g., making their contact information available on both the Aarhus Convention and Convention on Biological Diversity websites, and on relevant national websites);

(b) Encourage Parties to the Aarhus Convention to nominate an additional focal point dealing specifically with GMO issues, given the complexity of the subject matter and the specific expertise required;

- (c) Strengthen cooperation between public authorities and NGOs on GMO/LMO issues and promote effective interministerial or interdepartmental mechanisms to handle GMO/LMO issues that are open to NGOs, academia and other stakeholders (e.g., advisory bodies, national gene banks and associations);
- (d) Make use of the Aarhus Centres, if available, or other relevant organizations, to help strengthen the capacities of authorities to effectively promote access to information and public participation in LMO/GMO issues, thereby assisting Parties to ratify the GMO amendment and implement the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in the context of LMOs/GMOs;
- (e) Ratify and implement the GMO amendment to the Aarhus Convention;
- (f) Promote awareness and education of decision makers in order to expedite adoption and implementation of domestic legislation related or applicable to LMOs/GMOs;
- (g) Establish an effective system of access to information with regard to LMOs/GMOs that would allow all interested stakeholders to receive information in a timely and effective manner;
- (h) Establish a system enabling effective and inclusive public participation with regard to LMOs/GMOs;
- (i) Provide access to information with regard to customs officials, laboratories and other relevant stakeholders on existing legal provisions on the handling, transport, packaging and identification of LMOs/GMOs, including for an efficient border control system;
- (j) Address the issue of non-compliance in some countries where laws regarding LMOs/GMOs are in place that may provide for a ban, while in practice LMOs/GMOs are illegally grown and available on the market with no reliable information provided to the public;
- (k) Encourage the extension and implementation of the programme of work on public awareness, education and participation concerning the safe transfer, handling and use of LMOs under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety until 2020, encourage the adoption of priority areas or activities to implement article 23 and enhance cooperation with the Aarhus Convention in the context of LMOs/GMOs;
- (l) Encourage countries outside ECE region to accede to the Aarhus Convention and its GMO amendment and/or to make use of the Lucca Guidelines and the Maastricht Recommendations as tools for developing legislation and procedures for effective access to information and public participation in the context of LMOs/GMOs;
- (m) Make use of all available guidance material, such as the checklist of key measures required for ratifying and implementing the two instruments and the summary of tools and resources to support implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in the context of LMOs/GMOs,⁵ developed jointly under the auspices of the two treaties;
- (n) Participate in training activities to ensure that the GMO amendment and article 23 are essential when mainstreaming issues related to access to information and public participation with regard to LMOs/GMOs into broader processes, programmes and agendas relating to biodiversity, environment and sustainable development;

⁵ Available from <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/gmos.html>.

(o) Actively exchange information through the Biosafety Clearing-House⁶ and the Aarhus Clearinghouse⁷ and engage in regional cooperation in facilitating clearing houses, in particular sharing case studies on best practices and lessons learned in promoting access to information and public participation;

(p) Make use of international events, such as International Day for Biodiversity on 22 May, or organize a biosafety week to raise awareness and provide information on LMOs/GMOs to the general public;

(q) Communicate and promote benefits of access to information and effective public participation on LMO/GMO issues;

(r) Take into account socioeconomic considerations in promoting public awareness and education campaigns on biosafety to ensure that information reached marginalized groups (e.g., women, local communities, ethnic minorities and different linguistic groups).

34. At the multilateral level, the secretariats and subsidiary bodies of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety should, as appropriate, continue assisting countries in ratifying and implementing the two instruments in the context of LMOs/GMOs through:

(a) Encouraging bilateral and regional cooperation and partnerships with relevant organizations working in countries so as to promote ratification of the GMO amendment and the implementation of article 23 and the Aarhus Convention in the context of LMOs/GMOs;

(b) Promoting regional (e.g., the Asian Biosafety Clearing House Family and the European Network of GMO Laboratories) and international networks to share benefits and good practices;

(c) Inviting the Global Environment Facility and other financial mechanisms to provide eligible Parties with dedicated financial resources to facilitate effective implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety's programme of work and the Aarhus Convention in the context of LMOs/GMOs;

(d) Providing training materials for countries to help them to ensure that biosafety considerations are featured prominently when mainstreaming the provisions of the Aarhus Convention and article 23 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety into biodiversity, environmental and sustainable development policies and programmes;

(e) Keeping up with recent developments in relation to synthetic biology and new breeding techniques that may have an impact on defining LMOs/GMOs;

(f) Developing "a pocket guide" describing benefits, systemic challenges, priority areas and good practices in relation to promoting transparency and public participation in LMO/GMO matters;

(g) Organizing a similar round table in the next intersessional period of the two treaties, so as to allow Parties to both instruments from different regions to exchange experiences, thereby supporting implementation of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in the context of LMOs/GMOs in synergy, and to explore opportunities to allocate funds also for participation of representatives of non-ECE countries.

35. The proposed concrete actions and the key outcomes of the round table will be reported to both the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (Budva, Montenegro, 11–14 September 2017) and to the eighth meeting of the Conference

⁶ <https://bch.cbd.int>.

⁷ <https://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org>.

of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety
(Cancun, Mexico, 4–17 December 2016).
