

## ***Evaluation of GEF Support for Biosafety***



Biotechnology is probably as old as civilization itself. Special methods of food preparation, such as developing drinks from fermenting wheat or fruit, or making cheese, were known in prehistoric times.

In recent decades, this old science has seen dramatic new developments. The recent development of such new biotechnologies as living modified organisms (LMOs) raised hopes that these would contribute to an increase in world agricultural production and thereby help reduce hunger and disease. However, the emergence of LMOs has also led to concerns about their potential harmful effects on the environment and human health. These concerns were addressed through the Convention on Biological Diversity, which provided a framework to negotiate the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, which regulates international transfers of LMOs and aims to reduce risks for human health and the environment.

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is the designated financial mechanism for the Cartagena Protocol. The GEF's initial financing of capacity-building activities in biosafety began in 1997, but increased considerably after the GEF Council approved in 2000 an Initial Strategy for Assisting Countries to Prepare for the Entry into Force of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. In November 2004, the GEF Council asked the Evaluation Office to initiate an evaluation of the biosafety activities financed under the Initial Strategy.

This report presents the results of this evaluation, which covered the following GEF-supported biosafety capacity-building activities: (1) development of National Biosafety Framework (NBF) projects in 100 countries, (2) development of NBF projects in an additional 20 countries (an add-on initiative), (3) NBF implementation projects (12 countries), and (4) certain aspects of GEF support for implementation of the centralized Biosafety Clearing-House database initiative (50 countries).

### **Findings**

The evaluation found that GEF support has been consistent with the Cartagena Protocol, and neutral in its approach to biosafety issues. Although this will not end the debate on how to approach capacity building for biosafety and LMOs, it does mean that GEF support can continue to bring more transparency and scientific know-how to these issues, while at the same time allowing stakeholders to express their interests in a clear way. Thus, the Cartagena Protocol can continue to evolve as the mechanism for international cooperation on this highly controversial issue.

The evaluation provides many valuable findings that will allow the GEF to improve and adapt its future support for biosafety. For example, it was found that countries that already had considerable experience with biosafety issues were better able to use the support provided. The needs of countries with little prior biosafety experience were not as well addressed.

The GEF has contributed to building scientific and management capacities in biosafety in all countries evaluated, although the effectiveness of the work varied. A majority of countries had achieved notable stakeholder involvement, but progress regarding regional collaboration had fallen short of the initial planned level of achievement. Nevertheless, the GEF support has, on the whole, made an important contribution to preparing countries for ratification and implementation of the protocol.

In summary, the evaluation concluded the following:

- GEF support has been consistent with the Cartagena Protocol.
- The GEF has contributed to speeding up ratification and has promoted implementation processes of the Cartagena Protocol.
- The National Biosafety Framework development project was not adequately designed and funded to take

the complexities of national conditions and needs fully into account.

- Awareness-raising and participation efforts by different stakeholders have not been as broad as required by the Cartagena Protocol and advised by GEF project documents. Support for capacity building under the Biosafety Clearing-House has increased general access to information, even if the data-sharing obligations have not been fully met.
- Capacity development in risk assessment and risk management has primarily been of a general and introductory nature. Few countries have as yet effectively integrated biosafety matters with other existing relevant risk management structures.
- Subregional cooperation with the objective of information sharing has been satisfactory, but no subregional harmonization of scientific, legal, and regulatory instruments has taken place, except in the European Union accession countries.
- The NBF development project has been effective in countries with prior biosafety experience and some level of existing competence, but not as satisfactory in countries with less prior experience and competence.
- At the global level, consultation and coordination by the GEF Secretariat have been weak. Little consideration has been given to whether biosafety could be better linked to related aspects of the GEF's biodiversity portfolio.

## Recommendations

- Future assistance should be better planned and customized to each participating country. The GEF has initiated important work in developing and implementing NBFs in 142 countries. Future support should be better tailored to the respective country conditions and national support better integrated with regional collaboration, where appropriate.
- The GEF should consider providing longer term training for building and sustaining specialist capacity in risk assessment and risk management. Biosafety is a highly

technical and specialized area. The required competence for full implementation of the Cartagena Protocol requires systematic and longer term training of staff than has thus far taken place.

- The GEF should continue to emphasize awareness-raising and public participation issues, including support to the Biosafety Clearing-House. There is wide support among participants for increased emphasis on awareness raising, public consultation, and information sharing.
- The GEF should work toward a higher degree of donor collaboration and other cost-sharing schemes at the global and national levels. Future requests for funding in the biosafety area are likely to increase. A large number of countries now expect to move from the NBF development phase to the implementation phase; this will entail investments in—for example—the upgrading and equipping of relevant laboratories and other facilities at the national, multi-country, or regional level.
- The GEF should seek advice from its Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel and other scientists as to whether and how biosafety could be better integrated strategically and programmatically into the GEF biodiversity portfolio. With the GEF's role as the financial mechanism for environmental conventions expands, and the number of focal areas increases, further efforts are needed to integrate and build synergies among various GEF areas and programs.

The GEF Evaluation Office is an independent entity reporting directly to the GEF Council, mandated to evaluate the focal area programs and priorities of the GEF.

The *Evaluation of GEF Support for Biosafety* (January 2006) is available on the GEF Evaluation Office website at [thegef.org](http://thegef.org) (in the Publications section under Program Evaluations and Thematic Studies, Biodiversity). For information on United Nations Environment Programme activities, see [unep.ch/biosafety](http://unep.ch/biosafety). For more information, please contact the GEF Evaluation Office at [gefevaluation@thegef.org](mailto:gefevaluation@thegef.org).