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Successful Global Partnership Links Agriculture and Environment To Strengthen the Capacity of Developing Countries in Biosafety Risk Assessment and Regulation



On September 9, 2015, a closing workshop was held at the World Bank Headquarters in Washington, D.C., to mark the completion of the Partnership for Biosafety Risk Assessment and Regulation (PBRAR). The PBRAR was a US \$1.2 million program funded through the World Bank's Development Grant Facility (DGF) that ran from July 1, 2011 to December 31, 2014.

The Partnership was comprised of the ILSI Research Foundation's Center for Environmental Risk Assessment, the OECD Environment Directorate, the World Bank, and eight developing countries that have, or are considering, the adoption of agricultural biotechnology: Bangladesh, Vietnam, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Colombia, Paraguay, and Uruguay. These countries represent a range of geographic areas in different stages of economic development and with varying capacity in agricultural biotechnology, regulatory systems

and environmental risk assessment.

The PBRAR addressed the important global issue of ensuring science based risk assessment and regulation of genetically engineered crops. Partners worked together to strengthen the technical capacity of stakeholders engaged in biosafety risk assessment and regulation to facilitate evidence based decision making.

The Partnership used a flexible and responsive approach to meet the specific needs of the eight countries. The PBRAR included a combination of activities in policy and knowledge sharing, as well as technical assistance on environmental risk assessment and regulatory system design. It also encouraged greater harmonization of biotechnology regulations, particularly through partner country engagement with OECD's technical working groups on these topics.

"The advances in science require constant adaptation of regulatory institutions in order to facilitate methodical access to biotechnology. In this sense, I can point out, there has been an improvement of the capabilities of a large number of participants and the updates of the regulatory framework that are being implemented as a result of the activities that are being developed in the framework of the Partnership Program.

Finally, it can be mentioned that this Program has particular interest for Paraguay because it is a country whose agriculture has adopted products derived from modern biotechnology in a relatively short time, doubling the area of soybean planted, which passed from a million and a half hectares in 2004 to over three million in 2013. The performance of corn and cotton, which have been recently approved, can be similar to that of soybean."

- Mr. Santiago Bertoni, Director Unidad de Comercio Internacional e Integración del Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería del Paraguay

The goal of the PBRAR was to enable partner country stakeholders to better promote harmonization and rationalization of biosafety regulations in their countries. This goal was not only met but resulted in: two OECD consensus documents on the biology of cassava and common bean, important tools that will be used inform risk assessments; 26 national and regional workshops focusing on biosafety, risk assessment, and regulatory harmonization; technical support and training of over 600 biosafety regulators, risk assessors and other scientists; and two online training courses on relevant biosafety topics.

The Partnership:

- Improved the efficiency of national regulatory systems in several targeted countries through establishing effective partnerships with national regulators to share technical expertise on environmental risk assessment and procedures to enable more efficient decision making within national regulatory systems.
- Increased the evidence base for regulatory decision making by producing and disseminating technical publications.
- Enabled regulators from several developing countries to participate substantively in regional and global policy

deliberations on biosafety regulations, notably within OECD technical working groups and in meetings of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

- Provided opportunities to assess the net economic benefits likely to be gained from improving the efficiency of regulatory systems to enable more timely decisions to be made on the introduction and commercial use of new agricultural biotechnologies. This was most clearly demonstrated in Paraguay and Vietnam, where both countries moved ahead to obtain earlier access to new technologies, specifically approval for new soybean cultivars in Paraguay and new maize cultivars in Vietnam.

The PBRAR is one of the few biotechnology and biosafety programs that has successfully created bridges between the agricultural sector and the environmental sector. Strong program leadership by the Director of the Center for Environmental Risk Assessment and senior technical and communications staff leading the PBRAR's various activities contributed to the success of the program.

“The Partnership on Biosafety Risk Assessment and Regulation was a well led and well managed program on environmental risk assessment and regulation in agricultural biotechnology. The Partnership was both effective and efficient in providing technical assistance on environmental risk assessment and enhancing regulatory systems in several developing countries.”
- Dr. Gabrielle Persley, Lead Author, PBRAR External Review

“Biosafety risk assessment is a dynamic, scientific exercise that requires significant technical capacity. While the PBRAR has largely met its performance and outcome objectives in this regard, its lasting impact will be dependent on sustained commitments by our country partners to continue to implement and improve upon the gains made under the program. Tools like the e-learning platform and country-specific microsites will continue post-PBRAR but, more importantly, it is our hope that the community of practice established through the PBRAR will continue.”
-Dr. Morven McLean, Executive Director, ILSI Research Foundation

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